

# A FLYING FINN

## FINNISH CIVIL SOCIETY ACTORS IN THE GLOBAL SPHERE

*Tuomo Melasuo, Petter Nissinen & Outi Tomperi (eds.)*

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*Finnish Civil Society Actors in the Global Sphere*



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(eds.)

TAPRI Net Series

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## **A FLYING FINN... A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO GLOBAL LIFE**

*Tuomo Melasuo*

“Noblesse oblige”... and the globalisation even more! The main change during the last five or ten years has been that Finnish civil society actors no longer see themselves as components in the relationships between Finland and the outside world - that is, acting internationally between Finland and other countries - but consider themselves global actors, not being limited to any particular national agendas. As a matter of fact, this is natural, so interconnected has the world become, so interpenetrated have our societies become. Nation states are not disappearing, many éminence grises say, but they are definitely changing their profiles, say many more. In our global age, the equation between local, national and international is much more hybrid than it was a decade ago. The proverb “Think global, act local” is a good example of this. The importance of all kind of networking for Finnish civil society actors confirms this feature.

This evolution takes place at least in two different ways. On the one hand, people who are active in Finnish civil society organizations often aim to reach the international sphere, be it European or global. But this international networking has become a goal of its own. Finnish civil society people want to locate themselves in the international environment in order to satisfy their own personal ambitions in Finland and abroad.

On the other hand, the substance, the content of the activities is the main issue, not their geographic dimensions. In this case, the Finnish civil society organizations need international and global performances in order to be able to practice and legitimise their programmes inside Finland. Thus you must act globally in order to be able to do it locally as well. Besides organizations, this is also valid for individual people. If you want to accelerate your career in Finland, you had better have some solid international experience in order to succeed inside the country.

I think we have definitely managed to locate Finland and ourselves within the global sphere. In other words, we have reached the stage of globalisation in our everyday lives.

In this collection of articles, one of the Flying Finns, Rilli Lappalainen, when dealing

with the post-2015 world, writes about the complexity of globalisation in a very interesting way. From the development agenda point of view, she discusses the issues in global governance that are needed to measure progress in terms of equality and human rights realisation. In line with her reasoning, global challenges can only be answered by global responses. The ultimate goal is to create “a just and sustainable world in which every human being may realise their rights and enjoy a life free from violence and poverty”. Alas, quite a programme. Fortunately, the article by Rilli Lappalainen is very concrete and down to earth, otherwise she could be taken as one of the illuminated utopians.<sup>1</sup> In her article, she describes the complexity of factors to be taken into account when trying to imagine global governance.

Behind this collection of articles lies the idea of asking the members of the Finnish national network of the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) to write about their experiences of the international sphere and the way they live in their international and global cooperation. Those who participated in the Anna Lindh Mediterranean Forum in Marseille in April 2013 were asked to write about their experiences of that event.

The result is that the articles are very different. Some of them rather carefully relate the author’s personal multicultural experiences. Only three of them tell the story of Marseille in a more substantial way. Many of them describe the work and profile of their own organization in Finland without connecting it to the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue between cultures. The biggest group is composed of those having a religious dimension, either concentrating on the interfaith dialogue or just simply evocating the importance of their own affiliation. The general level of the articles also remains very different.

“A Flying Finn” continues with a very nice, touching and personal text by Timo Virtala, where he tells us how he became a pacifist and what role his multicultural experiences played in that. He also shows us that the roots of the European peace movement lie in intercultural dialogue between France and Germany after the First World War. He ends with an alarming statement denouncing violent computer games as part of the contemporary culture of violence.

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<sup>1</sup> “A just and sustainable world in which every human being may realise their rights and enjoy a life free from violence and poverty” as a goal reminds me of all those gentilhommes from Barthélemy Prosper Enfantin to Karl Marx who were dreaming under the Mediterranean sun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The text by Timo Virtala is followed by two other personal accounts. Describing his experience in solidarity activities with Western Sahara and Swaziland, Karim Maïche manages to highlight the importance of sharing every day family life or other informal events for multicultural learning in an interesting way. This, of course, concerns not only the Finnish hosts but also their guests, who will gain a much more varied and intimate image of Finnish life.

Ari Rusila shares his experiences in the Web 2.0 World as an established blogger whose motto is “The other side of the story”. This article shows us how difficult and complex this new social media’s cyber world really is. Technological performance can take over and make you socially, culturally and politically blind. All kinds of things happen in cyberspace and everything is possible. In the media war you can even turn the end result of the Vietnam War upside down without really being noticed. In order to have a genius intercultural dialogue you need to have a clear mind and iron-strong discipline. It is not enough to be critical of the authorities, you need to apply self-criticism even more in order to be really credible and contribute to our intercultural discussion in a significant way. The same is valid in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict where self-criticism is equally required for not forgetting the security of the Palestinians.

Risto Veltheim, Kati Lepojärvi and Jennifer Dahlbäck deal with Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in general and with the Anna Lindh Mediterranean Forum 2013 in Marseille in particular.

Risto Veltheim, a senior and well experienced ambassador, is in charge of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership for Finland, and also represents us on the board of the Anna Lindh Foundation. He writes about the difficulties the Euro-Mediterranean community is facing after the “Arab Spring”, when several Southern Mediterranean societies are trying to have a new political and social beginning and replace the old authoritarian regimes. He rightly pays attention to the differences between these countries, to the lacunas by the European media in their reporting on the local evolution and the main political blockages in the area. He also describes the Finnish contribution of about 42 million euros for 2012-2017 to assist the transition period in the Arab world. He ends his article by quoting the optimistic proposal from André Azoulay, President of ALF, at the Marseille Forum on the

millions of citizens now taking their common destiny into their own hands.

In an interesting way, Kati Lepojärvi of STETE<sup>2</sup> describes how a Finnish organization that is not especially devoted to the Mediterranean understands the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation since the Barcelona Process and positions itself in it. She also gives us an exciting account of her experiences at the Marseille Forum. She pays particular attention to the first summit of the speakers of the parliaments of the Union for the Mediterranean, which Martin Schulz saw as the will of the Euro-Mediterranean parliaments to assume their role in its political leadership. Kati Lepojärvi is also able to look at the Forum from the point of view of the citizens and civil societies. Her analyses of these aspects of the Forum and practical networking are particularly well described.

Jennifer Dahlbäck, from the Christine and Göran Schildt Foundation, is also an extraordinary example of how “Young Flying Finns” are able to benefit from events like the Anna Lindh Mediterranean Forum 2013 in Marseille. In her relatively short text she masterly navigates between the cultural heritage of her own foundation, its activities today and the Forum. Like Karim Maïche in his solidarity activities, she places a lot of importance on personal relationships in cultural encounters. Her participation in the sessions on “Culture and Creativity” led her to conclude that culture should be a right in international relations and not just “a little extra”.

About one-third of the articles in this collection deal with religions or religiously-oriented organizations in one way or other. This section is opened by Heidi Rautionmaa, who relates her experiences in many international interfaith organisations, first of all in the United Religions Initiative, the Parliament of the World’s Religions and Religions for Peace. By doing this she shows us how the interfaith dialogue manages to propose that different faiths together reaffirm certain basic values. In this she pays attention to the emergence and evolution of “Global Ethic” and “Golden Rule”.<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, she highlights that interfaith dialogue today can no longer restrict itself to communication between religions but must really contribute to social and political justice. She also circulates in an impressive way between local and global, between neighbourhood

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<sup>2</sup> STETE, the Finnish Committee for European Security. Its executive committee consists of representatives of the leading political parties in the parliament, <http://eng.stete.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Global Ethic”, sometimes called “World Ethic”, shares basic ethical values and criteria. “Golden Rule” means the principle that “we must treat others as we wish others to treat us”.

activities in Finland and worldwide global structures. At the end of her text she emphasizes the potential of a common sharing of spirituality in order to achieve peaceful coexistence. This kind of personal experience leads to highlighting ethics instead of doctrine, she writes.

The United Nation's Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) is an organisation very similar to the Anna Lindh Foundation but acting world-wide and being more focused on religions. Ilari Rantakari, a very experienced ambassador, is acting as the focal point of the alliance in our Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The UNAOC concentrates its activities on Global Forums as well as regional strategies and action plans. On the one hand, the Alliance acts as an instrument between the states, on the other hand it is looking more and more towards regional and even civil society partners. Päivi Käre-Zein's text shows us how educational establishments can participate in the World Interfaith Harmony Week initiated by the UNAOC.

In her article on FOKUS, the Forum for Culture and Religion, Riitta Latvio tells us about the activities of this organization. First of all comes its study and survey "Do we need Imam training in Finland?", and what it does as a Common Project Action of the Finnish ALF network, of which FOKUS is a member. This investigation fits well with the overall activities of FOKUS, which is also connected internationally to the UNAOC and Religions for Peace.

For me, it is obvious that, in general, we need more education on Islam and the Muslim world. Organising the education of Imams in the long term requires, I think, a higher education level and status, such as the theological faculties and seminars concerning Lutherans and Orthodox have in our country. Thus the education of Imams should be non-confessional and it should take place in the universities. Here, Finland could be one of the forerunners in Europe. Of course, as Riitta Latvio says, we also need female guides in Islam.

The two last articles in this section are more personal and intimate accounts of living with interfaith dialogue in Finland. Lars Silén, a bahá'í, has participated in the same neighbourhood interfaith dialogue circles as Heidi Rautionmaa. He puts emphasis on the fact that interfaith dialogue is, first of all, a learning process. He raises two practical principals: tell others if something hurts you, and listening to what the other is saying is



the beginning of understanding.

Paula Kemell writes about the role of Shia Muslims in Finland and presents the Resalat Islamic Society, of which she is the chairperson. As a minority among the Muslim population, the Shia community pays a great deal of attention to communication, for which the Resalat cultural magazine “Salam” is a tool in dialogue between cultures.

The last two articles in this collection, written by two journalists, do not directly focus on the Mediterranean world but deal with the experiences of the Somali diaspora exiled to Finland, who have lived with us for about a quarter of century. In an interesting way, Esa Aallas shows us how, besides the difficulties of integration, discrimination and explicit racism, it is also the evolution of their original homeland that has an important impact on the ways in which the Somalis manage to restart their lives here. At the same time, individual Somalis as well as the civil society organizations of our Somali community are able to intervene positively in different development efforts in their country of origin. This has created a very interesting cultural interconnection between these two faraway countries.

In early 2013, Anne Hyvönen witnessed the emergence of Aman, the first women-run radio station in Somalia. She is also active in the health sector in Hargeisa, Northern Somalia. In her article, she analyses how the Somalis established in Finland cooperate with their original country via different civil society organisations, either by visiting it regularly or doing advocacy work here in the North of everything. This is grassroots dialogue between cultures par excellence.

Maybe the most positive contribution of this collection is that it shows the multitude and plurality of actors who participate in the dialogue between cultures in Finland. This concerns not only our state and its organs, churches and religious organisations but also the civil society. And they all act in the international and global sphere.

There was something almost comic about the Anna Lindh Mediterranean Forum 2013 in Marseille. Compared with the Barcelona Forum “pouvoir public”, the EU organs and states were much more visible in Marseille. And they talked more about the civil society than they did in Barcelona. Commissar Štefan Füle, as well as Martin Schulz, the President of European Parliament, were almost competing against each other in praising the increasing importance of the civil society and asking for strengthening its

organisations. This is a delicate issue and we should maybe take note that the debate on the relationship between civil society organisations and states is important in Southern European and Mediterranean countries, where a Jacobean concept of state prevails, in a different way to that in the North, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world.<sup>4</sup> Maybe the Nordic practice, where states and civil societies are very much interpenetrated and intermingled, could be an interesting approach in the Mediterranean area as well. Who knows?

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<sup>4</sup> Luc Ferry in “L'anglais, chance ou danger pour le français?”, propos recueillis par Marc-Olivier Bherer et Benoît Floc'h, *Le Monde*, 3.6.2013.



## **POST-2015 – A CLEAR FUTURE VISION IS NEEDED**

*Rilli Lappalainen*

The world has started different processes to write a new agenda for its future. The post-2015 agenda will be based on the experiences gained from The Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) and new political priorities.

The Millenium Development Goals framework, which was agreed in 2005, concentrated development policies on specific areas and harmonised aid by making the fight against poverty one of the key elements of the development policy in a significant number of international institutions and governments (albeit with unequal involvement and commitment). The MDGs were used as a benchmark by national governments in setting up their poverty reduction strategies and by donors in outlining their development cooperation policies. It contributed to the harmonisation of international and national policies, plans and strategies. In the case of the EU, the objective of poverty eradication in the context of sustainability has been enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty.

The MDGs also led to the development of some new policy and programming instruments, such as the longer term EU ‘MDG Contracts’, which brought about more planning security for partners. To a certain degree, the framework improved transparency in some countries through the production of regular reports on progress and accountability through improved data collection resulting from the simple nature of the indicators (for instance, the MDG5 indicators improved the availability of data on the maternal mortality ratio; the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel and the adolescent birth rate).

It is crucially important to “transfer” or to retain the nature of the positive elements of the MDG framework in any new framework that will be elaborated in the future:

- The MDGs led to more focus and priority-setting in the debates and, to a lesser extent, in the actions of the international community (particularly as regards social development and social policy). In a number of countries, some of the goals were

made explicit in national development policies and bilateral development cooperation agreements.

- The statistical methodology and data needed as a basis for analysis and policy development were improved for those issues that feature prominently in the MDG framework (which does not gainsay the need for further disaggregated data).
- The MDG framework was built on a set of concrete goals and predominantly quantifiable targets that were relatively simple and straightforward to understand, explain and monitor. Progress could be measured, albeit in an overly narrow manner, on the basis of the agreed indicators.
- The MDGs helped to mobilise public opinion and raise media attention in some countries. Knowledge of the geography of the problems was consequently enhanced, even if their root causes were not fully identified or addressed by the MDGs framework. Organisations in the South also reported appreciation of the framework for improving the awareness of development issues, spurring commitment from governments and turning the fight against poverty into a global movement.<sup>5</sup>
- Resource flows increased until recently. Official Development Assistance (ODA) for all sectors combined increased immediately following the introduction of the MDGs, and the health sector's share of these resources more than doubled.<sup>6</sup>

However, some of the strengths of the MDG framework also proved to be risks and weaknesses. For example, the narrow focus on a number of social issues and the fact that progress in the field has been measured by narrow indicators has led to late inclusion, undervaluation or even total omission of some important aspects of development, such as peace and conflict, freedom from violence, governance and anti-corruption, decent work and social protection, uneven population growth, etc. There is, therefore, an inherent danger in the 'MDG approach' in that it reduces 'development' to progress on some of the basic needs and development policy to development assistance to the most poor and

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<sup>5</sup> 100 Voices, CAFOD, 2010

<sup>6</sup> OECD 2011; United Nations Statistics Division 2012; Post-2015 Health MDGs, Lu et al, 2010

problematic countries. They have contributed to a narrowing of the focus of international efforts to providing development assistance to poor and/or fragile countries.

Some flaws in the framework have been evident from the very beginning. For example, the rights-based approach to development of the Millennium Declaration was to a large extent lost in the formulation of the Goals. The design of the MDGs became a technocratic, top-down exercise. Southern governments, poor and vulnerable people, the populations concerned, and small and remote communities were not closely involved in the process. A one-size-fits-all approach was taken, which contributed to a lack of ambition at the national level, where the goals seemed to be unreachable anyway. The lack of participation and consequent ownership may also have contributed to the failure of the MDGs “to engage with power and politics. The transformations needed to achieve the MDGs and further global development should have been driven by domestic politics and local actors”.<sup>7</sup> Instead, the MDG framework fostered an approach to development that focused on the volume of financial aid while side-lining the fundamental reforms needed to realise people’s rights. Through setting targets on the basis of quantifiable indicators rather than including qualitative and outcome-based indicators, the framework promoted a narrow approach to ‘solving’ poverty through ‘paying’ and failed to adequately address the structural barriers that drive and perpetuate poverty and inequality. Indeed, the formulation of the MDGs has inadvertently contributed to increasing inequality between people.

The lack of a rights-based approach also led to a number of other limitations in the MDG framework. For example, while reducing extreme poverty by half could be seen as a laudable aim, eradicating it, as a rights-based approach would imply, would be still better. However, if one were to be aiming to improve people’s overall security and building their resilience as part of a future framework, these levels could be seen as quite inadequate.

The framework entirely omitted the incorporation of a focus on policy coherence (the need for all actors to ensure that their policies in any area do not negatively impact on the set development goals and objectives but preferably support them) and accountability mechanisms. It overlooked the need to take a comprehensive approach - that is, to include

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<sup>7</sup> After the Millennium Development Goals, Save the Children International, April 2012

other policy areas that have significant impact on the achievement of development objectives for development by predominantly focusing on the social sectors. MDG8 was a clearly an attempt at wider participation and impact from other policy sectors. However, it lacked quantifiable indicators similar to the other goals and, as such, any progress in this regard is more difficult to attribute to the MDG project.

Policy coherence for development is fundamental to the success of any development framework. There are few policy areas that have no impact on developing countries in one way or another, be that indirectly or directly. Similarly, recognition of the complexity and interconnectedness of issues – such as, food security and nutrition, health, education, water and sanitation, and gender equality – was also missing.

The framework lacks the notion of respect for human rights. The MDG framework does not draw attention to deeper causes of poverty, such as the violation of key human rights principles of non-discrimination, meaningful participation and accountability. The current goals do not highlight the inequity and inequalities notable in access to health care that hide vulnerable and marginalised groups from the statistics. It is thus important to measure progress in terms of equality and human rights realisation. Due to the concentration of income, power and access to resources in the wealthiest quintile of the population in many countries, the national average on a range of development indicators can greatly differ from the average for the 80% of the population that excludes the upper quintile. This kind of disparity also exists for many other non-income-related parameters, such as gender, age, geography (urban-rural), etc. Therefore, the notion of equity should be at the core of the future framework.

Other significant gaps in terms of the process, which must be addressed in the post-2015 framework, include the lack of:

- A strong link with the principles of the Millennium Declaration.
- A focus on the rights of marginalised groups and those groups traditionally excluded from development processes.
- Adequate or fairly shared financing across the MDGs and between countries.
- Targets for the so-called ‘developed’ nations, other than very weakly in MDG8.
- Binding agreements and commitments.

Another major issue is that sustainability, although present in MDG7, was hardly visible in the framework and ended up being regularly referred to as the water and sanitation goal. That led to all the other aspects, such as environmental degradation and natural resource issues, being overlooked. The critical role of environmental sustainability as a cross-cutting issue is not apparent, but, as with other cross-cutting issues, it underpins the achievement of many other Goals. As the 2011 UN Human Development Report points out, environmental deterioration threatens to reverse progress in human development for the world's poorest, impacting on livelihoods, health, food security, nutrition, access to water and agricultural productivity.<sup>8</sup> The notion of sustainability should, at a minimum, also include economic and social sustainability in addition to environmental sustainability since this would better address people's well-being and resilience.

### **A future framework?**

Poverty and inequality are not accidents of fate. They are the results of specific power relationships and policy decisions that are discriminatory, exclusionary and unjust. Governance describes the institutional context within which human rights are achieved or denied; it is about how power and authority are exercised in the management of national and global public affairs and resources. Crucially, it is about whether the most marginalised are empowered to meaningfully participate in decision-making. Governance, as it relates to discussions on a post-2015 framework, should be viewed from two different angles:

- Global governance arrangements and the potential impact upon a future development framework.
- The relationship between governance, participation and democracy, and poverty and poverty eradication outcomes.

To have an impact on global governance, a future framework must:

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/human\\_developmentreport2011.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/hdr/human_developmentreport2011.html)



- Result from a genuine participatory and inclusive process, where all nations (both developed and developing economies) and all stakeholders (governments, CSOs, grassroots organizations, private sector, IOs) are part of the negotiations. Whilst this will be a time and resource-consuming process, it will certainly *increase ownership* and consequently facilitate implementation; *create mutual accountability mechanisms*; and ultimately guarantee the *legitimacy* of the framework. As recognized by the UN Development Strategy Beyond 2015, “The process of formulation (...) of the Goals has been controversial. (...) They were put together by a technical committee of the UN, the World Bank and the DAC, and were not widely debated before they were formulated.”<sup>9</sup>
- Be truly global with shared responsibilities between all nations regardless of their level of economic development. Whilst this might be more difficult to negotiate, it will certainly create the base on which to build strong *consensus*. This means moving away from the anachronistic North-South divide, as recognised by the UN System Task Force “The global partnership itself should also be global”.<sup>10</sup>
- Be based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, to outline clear *global coordination mechanisms*. This implies moving away from the assumption, on which the MDG was based, that poverty reduction is mainly a responsibility of developing economies. The data shows that poverty is widespread in middle income economies and a direct challenge for developed economies.
- Have human rights as its core foundation. This is essential to secure an international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in human rights treaties and conventions can be fully realised. Grounding the post-2015 framework in human rights standards also reinforces accountability by stressing that meeting development commitments is not a matter of charity but one of legal obligation.

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<sup>9</sup>UNDESA Committee for Development Policy (2012) The United Nations Development Strategy Beyond 2015, [www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/cdp\\_publications/2012cdppolicynote.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/cdp_publications/2012cdppolicynote.pdf)

<sup>10</sup>UN System Task Team on the post-2015 agenda ( 2012) Realizing the future we want for all, [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/realizing-the-future-we-want/](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/realizing-the-future-we-want/)

Accountability mechanisms should be clearly outlined at the national, regional and international levels, and be accompanied by transparent monitoring systems. Accountability mechanisms should, therefore, not only be geared to poverty eradication but also to addressing every actor's role (be they a country, a company or an international organisation) and their commitments within the post-2015 framework. Mechanisms are needed at all levels, from local to global. Locally-led monitoring of the key pillars of the governance system,<sup>11</sup> involving all population groups and sectors is indispensable in reinforcing and complementing global systems. A mix of accountability mechanisms will be required; the focus should be on strengthening existing accountability mechanisms (such as Human Rights Monitoring and Reporting, Peer Review Mechanism, reports on implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements); and follow best-practice examples (e.g. national/regional human rights commissions/Court) or create new ones where there is a gap.

However, accountability should not just be upward, but also downward, to the people. In this regard, development education is crucial. Systems to allow civil society and individual citizens to know about their respective rights and responsibilities, the commitments made by their governments and to hold their representatives to account for the decisions they take are needed. Democratic accountability mechanisms and communication structures need to be accompanied by adequate civic education programmes that would enable an informed, critical and meaningful engagement of the population. Participatory and inclusive approaches to monitoring should include getting feedback from people on their perceptions of progress, facilitated through popular education measures that empower people to develop a critical understanding and engage on the topic in a meaningful way.

In times of globalisation and growing global interrelationships between economies and people, poverty eradication and, more holistically, the progressive and universal realisation of human rights are a universal responsibility and would bring universal benefits. Climate change, income inequality, migration, gender justice, financial

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<sup>11</sup> For instance, Transparency International identifies the following 'pillars' in a country's governance system: Legislative branches, executive branches, judiciary, public sector, law enforcement, electoral management body, ombudsman, audit institution, anti-corruption agencies, political parties, media, civil society and business.

regulation, conflict and other issues all have fundamental human rights dimensions that present themselves across countries with very different levels of income. Insofar as these issues require international cooperation, cross-border action and policy coordination, a global framework will be essential in order to secure accountability across country boundaries.

In general, a new global framework could offer the opportunity to have better policy coherence for development, thereby ensuring policy integration but also mainstreaming of key principles. A holistic approach would provide the possibility for effective and sustainable solutions to major global issues such as eradication of poverty, climate change and food security.

A global development framework that is based on the successes of the previous framework and lessons learned from the mistakes of the previous framework, and which realises people's rights, would:

- Reframe and redefine human progress and set out the key areas that need to be addressed in order for people's rights to be achieved, together with measures to do so;
- Recognise that we face global challenges that can only be met by global responses and detail the various actors' roles and responsibilities in achieving the goals.
- Set out states' obligations to fulfil the objectives of the framework at the national level.
- Create an enabling environment for a vibrant civil society in line with international human rights obligations. This would be particularly important in countries where, for various reasons, the tradition of civil society involvement is weak or not well-established. An active and strong civil society is, in turn, crucial to the successful implementation of a global post-2015 framework since it is a key actor in contributing to the realisation of set goals, monitoring the framework's implementation and securing the accountability of actors at all levels from national to global.
- Guarantee that international partnership commitments be brought in line with clear targets, timelines, indicators and procedures at all levels.

- Reaffirm the international community's obligation to support states in their efforts to progressively realise people's rights, if the state they live in is not in a position to finance the fulfilment of its obligations.

The primary purpose of a future framework should be to create a just and sustainable world in which every human being can realise their rights and enjoy a life free from violence and poverty.

Based on the Millennium Declaration and informed by the strengths and weaknesses of the MDGs, the framework - to achieve this purpose - needs to articulate a set of clear, concrete, binding objectives that have been agreed upon through a participatory process, which are time-bound and universal in nature, and have the capacity to capture and maintain appropriate and adequate support at the public and political levels.

The objectives must embody a commitment to eliminate the root causes of poverty and inequality, equity, environmental, economic and social sustainability, peace and security, resilience, good governance and policy coherence for development.

The framework must have accountability at its core and the commitments must be measurable, with associated indicators that are both quantitative and qualitative. The framework must reflect a move towards the principle of 'universality' and must harness and build on commitments made at international fora by the international community that seek to address contemporary challenges faced – in particular - by the poorest and most vulnerable, notably climate change and malnutrition and food insecurity.

The framework should also emphasise development education and raising of awareness, because although the MDGs have helped to mobilise public opinion and raise media attention in some countries, a wider range of tools and communication channels for informing citizens about their rights and responsibilities, and the commitments made by their governments are necessary. Participatory and inclusive approaches to monitoring should include getting feedback from people on their perceptions of progress, facilitated through popular education measures that empower people to develop a critical understanding and engage with the topic in a meaningful way.

The scope of the new framework must be global in order to recognise the obligation of all countries to address the challenges faced by people in low, middle and high income

countries. In order to make this framework relevant on a global level, it will be necessary to take account of historical differences, development levels, economic and technical capacity, local contexts and needs when developing strategies for implementation. This also means moving away from the traditional ‘developing-developed/North-South’ divide. It will therefore be necessary to differentiate on the regional and national level to establish realistic targets and timeframes that reflect individual countries’ strengths and weaknesses in any given priority area (common but differentiated responsibility approach). All countries should agree to make development progress, both individually and collectively. People around the world are continuing to suffer poverty, inequality and insecurity, and measures to resolve these challenges need to be aligned and coordinated at a global level.

The framework should represent and reflect consensus across the international community that:

- Human Rights are universal, they must be realised both at the national and international levels, and they must be respected by all actors, including the private sector.
- Inequality within and between countries requires particular attention.
- Global public goods, such as biodiversity, need global protection. Climate change mitigation and adaptation is essential at a global level.
- All countries have to make their policies coherent for development globally.

A global framework will enjoy greater legitimacy and acceptance than one which is not. In addition, the future agenda should provide an overall framework that is supportive of other global initiatives and seek to establish synergies and complementarities in order to be as effective and coherent as possible.

The new framework should be global and hence focus on those people most in need and whose human rights are violated the most, regardless of whether they live in low, middle or high income countries. However, the term “development objectives” needs to take into consideration that today, certain challenges do not pertain to any particular category of country and might not be considered a development issue, such as global

governance.

It is crucial to notice that there is a need to concentrate on the poorest populations and sub-populations rather than the poorest countries. This is due to the fact that the majority of poor people currently live in middle-income countries (MICs).<sup>12</sup> In order to achieve pro-poor outcomes, donor policies towards MICs and LICs (low-income countries) need to be adjusted, which is another reason why a more comprehensive focus is needed in the future framework (in terms of policy coherence for development, governance, etc).

At the same time, a differentiated approach is needed. Low-income countries require a specific approach as the pressing issue is to build and ensure access to services in a non-existent or weak national system, balancing emergency actions and strengthening the national system. Fragile and politically highly instable countries will also require a differentiated approach to targets and timeframes where a systems-strengthening approach might have to yield to more immediate approach. The poverty *incidence* is generally higher in the poorest and most fragile countries. This results in shocking statistics, such as the fact that approximately half of the children who die before their fifth birthday live in the poorest and most fragile countries.<sup>13</sup> No low-income, fragile or conflict-affected state has yet attained a single MDG, even though fragile states are home to approximately 1.5 billion people. Therefore, these countries do need specific attention.

There is also a need for a differentiated approach beyond the national level. This will be required to ensure that poor people are at the heart of development policies and resources, as “extreme poverty is gradually changing from a question of poor people in absolute poor countries to questions about domestic inequality.”<sup>14</sup>

To be meaningful, a future framework must address the interlinked challenges of conflict and insecurity, risk and vulnerability, and poverty since progress is fundamentally held back in countries where insecurity is high. Since each society has unique dynamics that can lead to conflict, it is unlikely that a single goal can be formulated to uphold peace

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<sup>12</sup> Sources: Aid workers are doing themselves out of a job, but..., Andrew Rogerson, ODI Blog Posts, 10 July 2012; Where do the world’s poor live? Where will they live in 2020 and 2030?, Andy Sumner, IDS, upcoming 2012

<sup>13</sup> The Millennium Development Goals and Fragile States: Focusing on What Really Matters, David Carment and Yiagadeesen Same, January 2011

<sup>14</sup> Where do the world’s poor live? Where will they live in 2020 and 2030?, Andy Sumner, 2012

and tackle fragility. However, the new framework must address the common root causes of insecurity that have been identified in research, as well as those ingredients that help countries to transition out of fragility.

The principle of Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) will be absolutely fundamental for the success of the future framework, especially given the shifting nature of poverty, the links between and impact of all policy areas on the achievement of development objective and the decline in ODA. As recently stressed by the UN System Task Force in their report on post-2015, “to realize the future we want for all, a high degree of policy coherence at the global, regional, national and sub-national levels will be required”.<sup>15</sup>

In practice, the ‘shared responsibility’ in the current MDG framework has led to diffused responsibility, allowing different actors to continuously avoid accountability while targeting other actors for a lack of progress. The new post-2015 framework must ensure a relationship based on genuine mutual accountability that also encompasses the impact of rich countries’ policies in areas such as trade, agriculture, energy, tax and financial regulation, etc. In this sense, PCD reinforces the spirit of the Millennium Declaration, which underlines political leaders’ “collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level”.<sup>16</sup> In this context, it is important to stress that while the major barrier to PCD is the failure of developed countries to redress harmful policies, the concept also requires developing countries to be consistent with development objectives domestically - such as in ensuring that economic growth leads to poverty reduction and is environmentally sustainable.

The importance of policy coherence for human rights commitments and sustainability should not be underestimated. All international actors, irrespective of differences in economic power and influence, should apply their mandates in ways that do not place their members in contradiction with obligations they have also undertaken in other international instruments and treaties.<sup>17</sup> Despite these legal requirements, policy and practice more often fail to cohere with international law. A robust institutional mechanism

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<sup>15</sup> Realizing the Future We Want for All, UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda Report to the Secretary-General, June 2012

<sup>16</sup> UN General Assembly (2000): UN Millennium Declaration, Art. 2

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

to prevent a richer country's negative impact on a poorer country is still missing, neither is there a complaints procedure open to governments, civil society organisations or local communities negatively affected by others' policies.

A set of general criteria that must be met by the new Framework can be deduced from the experiences with implementing PCD so far<sup>18</sup>:

- The framework's goals must be global in scope and tangible targets and indicators must be drawn up to allow for effective assessment of whether international, regional or domestic policies are coherent with the goals.<sup>19</sup> A clear set of objectives against which new policies and initiatives can be assessed is a fundamental requirement for PCD.
- Guidelines for proper institutional mechanisms such as PCD screening and monitoring of relevant policy-making processes at the international, regional and domestic levels must be attached to the new global goals. The guidelines must include specific indicators that allow for regular measurement of progress in the implementation of such mechanisms in both donor and developing countries.<sup>20</sup>
- The above points must be combined with clear lines of responsibility among the relevant institutions, starting with the UN, where the goals will be anchored, but including other international bodies, regional organisations, national governments and civil society.
- A redress mechanism should be established to allow affected people's voices to be heard and have their case raised when their rights are being undermined by incoherent policies.
- A UN Special Rapporteur for PCD should be appointed as part of the new post-2015 development framework.

Seeing PCD as a vision, an approach rather than a heavy burden, is what could

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<sup>18</sup> For a comprehensive overview, see *Delivering Results – How Denmark can lead the way for PCD*, Concord Denmark, 2012; see also *Building Blocks for Policy Coherence for Development*, OECD, 2009

<sup>19</sup> For example, the current international accounting standards facilitate massive outflows of illicit finance from developing countries. Globally binding targets to end these flows are needed, and all international accounting standards must be brought in line.

<sup>20</sup> The measurement would thus be operating similarly to the previous Monitoring Framework and Evaluation of the Paris Declaration.



enable the future framework to be powerful and efficient, and able to achieve a real change. It would also avoid every sectoral approach to be viewed too much in a silo and would ensure more holistic approaches.

It would be useful to create a checklist of priority policy areas for coherence that are crucial for poverty eradication,<sup>21</sup> which needs to be mainstreamed in the post-2015 development framework, and also take into account the EU's legal obligation under the Lisbon Treaty, which ensures that all policies take account of development objectives.

The post-2015 development agenda should promote transformative and positive change for all people in all countries by taking stock of the lessons learned from the MDGs experience, continuing the unfinished work towards the unmet MDGs targets and integrating emerging challenges and issues that have become more pressing since 2000.

In our view, the three overarching principles that should guide the future framework are:

- a human rights based approach<sup>22</sup> to development, in which every human being is recognised both as a person and as a right-holder, and in which every government (duty bearer) has the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil every right.<sup>23</sup> This approach promotes crucial issues such as participation, accountability, transparency, non-discrimination, empowerment and rule of law
- a global scope for the framework, with a one-world-approach including universal and common-but-differentiated responsibility
- putting the well-being of people and the planet at the centre.

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<sup>21</sup> As, for instance, in the EC (2010) Policy Coherence for Development Work Programme 2010- 2013, [http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/SEC\\_2010\\_0421\\_COM\\_2010\\_0159\\_EN.PDF](http://ec.europa.eu/development/icenter/repository/SEC_2010_0421_COM_2010_0159_EN.PDF)

<sup>22</sup> The human rights based approach is defined by the UN as: “a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyze inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress.” OHCHR (2006) Frequently asked questions on a human rights based approach to development cooperation, [www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FAQen.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FAQen.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> UNFPA (Undated) The human rights based approach, [www.unfpa.org/rights/approaches.htm](http://www.unfpa.org/rights/approaches.htm)

These principles should be seen through three cross-cutting themes:

- human rights and inequality
- environmental sustainability (including climate change)
- policy coherence for development.

In addition, specific policy areas to be included in the framework are:

- Human development based on the social sectors
- Mobility and migration
- Economy, consumption and production; trade and finance
- Environmental sustainability
- Governance.

No matter how the areas are eventually grouped or organised in the new framework, it is essential that they all be included, and that the complexities of the interlinkages also be addressed rather than dealing with each issue in a silo.



## HOW I BECAME WHAT I AM – THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL NGO EXPERIENCES IN FINDING ONE’S PATH

*Timo Virtala*

I'm a devoted pacifist, a pacifist in the original sense of the word, which means a person who works for peace, tries to reduce violence in the world and promotes ideas on how to prevent war. Most of my public talks, newspaper writings, blog articles, posts on Facebook – all my tweets – have to do with these themes. Most of my time goes into peace work. Sometimes I get paid, but usually not.

There is nothing radical or utopian about my passion. The grand old man of peace research, Johan Galtung, compares peace research with medical science, and it can be applied to peace work in general: it took hundreds of years for medical science to break through the monopolies of church and religion in defining sicknesses and healing people. Galtung asks whether it is going to take as long for peace research to gain authority in the field of violence. Thinking that war is the way to solve problems is like believing that sicknesses are punishments for your sins (Galtung 2003, 131).

We can take the comparison further and state that peace work reduces violence in the same way as medical science reduces sickness in the world. There has always been sickness in the world, and always will be, but that has never stopped doctors doing their work, and that has never stopped the public from supporting and respecting their work. I wish to see peace work enjoy the same respect and financing as medical science does today.

The word '*pacifism*' comes from two Latin words: '*pax*', which means peace, and '*ficus*', which means making. When the word was first introduced at the 10<sup>th</sup> Universal Peace Congress in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1901, it was a concept that united many different types of peace makers, peace promoters and peace friends - as they were called before the new concept. "*Pacifism also meant social action. It was not merely a philosophy but a political program and a commitment to social change.*" (Cortright 2008, 9).

According to Cortright, the common understanding of the term pacifism changed after the First World War. During the First World War, writes Cortright, “*most peace advocates [...] abandoned their commitment to transnational solidarity and marched off to war. [...] The purists who had opposed the march claimed the term for themselves. They narrowed its definition to the unconditional rejection of war in all its forms. [...] This narrow definition of pacifism left most of the peace community out in the cold.*” (Cortright 2008, 10)

Despite this, I prefer to define pacifism more broadly, in its original form, and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy agrees with that by defining pacifism as “*a commitment to peace and opposition to war. [It] includes a variety of commitments on a continuum from an absolute commitment to nonviolence in all actions to a more focused or minimal sort of anti-warism.*” In other words, the concept used to refer to *action on* something, but nowadays it increasingly refers to *refusal of* something. From this perspective, the term nonviolence – defined by the Oxford Dictionaries as “*the use of peaceful means, not force, to bring about political or social change*” – seems to indicate the original pacifism better than pacifism itself.

Unlike pacifism, nonviolence is gaining rising popularity as a method of political action, as a main mission or method for NGOs and as a subject of academic research (Sharp 2010, among others). To mention some of the most important organisations in this field, the Metta Center for Nonviolence was founded in 1982, the Albert Einstein institution (1983), The Center for Nonviolent Communication (1984), Nonviolence International (1989), Pace e Bene (1989), the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence (1991), Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst (1996), Nonviolent Peaceforce (2002) and Waging Nonviolence (2009). There are hundreds more, and new ones are popping up every year. According to a list given by JustVision, there are more than one hundred peace building and nonviolence organisations in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories alone.

Regardless of what we call the ideology, one of my main goals is to inspire youth to drop their war games, turn off their televisions and get excited about Tolstoy’s, Thoreau’s and Gandhi’s texts. It’s not an easy task. These thinkers have been dead for quite a while. Tolstoy’s War and Peace is the synonym for heavy books, and Gandhi’s collected works consist of 50,000 pages of letters, articles and books. How can I make the young

interested in this when the other option is, say, first-person shooter games? You switch on your computer and start shooting everything that moves before everything that moves shoots you. This makes your sight better, your decision-making process faster, improves your concentration and offers a healthy way of managing your aggression – or at least this is what they say. Science agrees with everything but the last one (Bavelier, Anderson). Common sense would also say that it is not so healthy for your aggression. The US military uses these games for training their soldiers to get over the natural human dislike of taking a life from another. After tens of thousands of repetitions, the soldiers – and our children, since we adults buy these games for them – become used to the idea of shooting each other (Hsu 2010, Nagler 2004, 19)

My criticism of violent computer games is usually the subject my students have most difficulties with. They have chosen not to do the Finnish military service but are doing their Civilian Service instead. This means that after one month of training at the Lapinjärvi Educational Centre, they go out and work for eleven months in schools, libraries, hospitals, homes for the elderly, universities, NGO offices, etc. So one would think that this audience is already wired for pacifism and nonviolence – and for the most part they are. The overwhelming majority of them accept my criticism of military spending, they agree that we, nonviolent actors, need to do more analysing and think more about strategies, we need to become more effective in making peace, and they love Gandhi's thought that in order to be a nonviolent actor you need to be more brave than if you use violence. But when it comes time to raise the downsides of first-person shooter games in particular and the violence entertainment industry in general, many critical voices arise.

My understanding of the problem has been greatly influenced by first reading, and then having a private discussion with, Emeritus Professor Michael N. Nagler, the founder of the Metta Centre of Nonviolence. As I see it now, violent video games, or the violent entertainment industry in general, are not the problem alone – and simply forbidding them is not the solution – but it is very important to see that they are part of a culture of violence that is also manifest in the news, politics, sports and commercials, among other things. The message of this culture is that ultimately, we are separate beings from each other, we are doomed to fight against each other over materialistic objects, and you (or

your team, country or culture) can only be happy by ‘winning’ this battle. Violent entertainment, together with some true TV shows, are the tip of the iceberg in this confrontationist culture, which is the source of both physical and structural violence.

The culture of violence also comes up in the much repeated storyline of good and evil, where, at the beginning, good is in a disadvantaged position, but, in the final battle, by using violence, good brings down evil and gets his reward. (Yes, his reward, not hers. Colin Stokes (2012) has pointed out that of the top 100 movies of 2011 in the United States, only 11 had female protagonists). This story is repeated not only in movies and books but also in the news and history. The Second World War is seen as an event of heroism rather than an event of the biggest failure of humankind. Criminal justice is seen as a way to warn and punish criminals instead of focusing on the needs of the victims, offenders and community.

The message of nonviolence is that we, as human beings, are one, interdependent in innumerable ways, and we can reach true happiness through things that are impossible to consume to the end, like love, a sense of belonging, usefulness, companionship and forgiveness. The unity of mankind is at the core of peace work.

Nagler's writings have been crucial in making me interested in ‘Gandhian nonviolence’, which is sometimes called principal, and sometimes also ideological nonviolence. According to Thomas Weber's and Robert J. Burrowes' introduction to nonviolence, *“Ideological exponents choose nonviolent action for ethical reasons and believe in the unity of means and ends. They view the opponent as a partner in the struggle to satisfy the needs of all. More fundamentally, they may view nonviolence as a way of life.”*

Nagler also opened my eyes to Mohandas Gandhi's constructive programme, which could be a huge source of ideas and energy for modern peace work. The constructive programme means building an ideal society from the grassroots, and finding positive alternatives to oppression. For Gandhi, this was probably even more important than his well-known ‘obstructive programme’ – i.e. non-cooperation with oppression. Gandhi's own constructive programme was about self-sufficiency, unity, education, prohibition, village sanitation and so forth. The modern constructive programme can be something

totally different, but the basic idea is to build the society we want. There are many advantages in this kind of peace work. First of all, the actors can decide when and where the action takes place and what the theme shall be. This is not the case in the usual type of peace work today, when the peace organisations react to someone else's doings. Second, you admit that a problem has more than one side and, through example, you show how to do your own share. Third, and most important, the results of constructive work are much longer lasting than the outcome of stopping someone from doing something.

The other aspect of nonviolence I'm particularly interested in is Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping. In this field, the Nonviolent Peaceforce is the biggest, most influential and most experienced organisation. During the last eleven years they have been sending trained and paid civilian peacekeepers to some of the world's most dangerous battle zones, like Sri Lanka, The Philippines, South Sudan and South Caucasus. The peacekeeper's aim is to foster dialogue among the parties in conflict and offer protection to civilians. I have had the opportunity to participate in Nonviolent Peaceforce's annual meetings in Lyon, France; Mariehamn, Åland; and Oslo, Norway. These meetings have offered me concrete knowledge and understanding of how nonviolence can work in extremely violent conditions.

But the most crucial NGO experience that has shaped my world view comes from a much earlier stage during my teenage years. I participated in a two-summers-long family interchange programme through Children's International Summer Villages. CISV left me with an indelible interest in multiculturalism and international questions. From the perspective of the effectiveness of peace work, I found the organisation's core idea genius: bringing children together from different parts of the world and letting them play, communicate and learn in a friendly, inclusive and enthusiastic atmosphere. Not much more is needed and the result is usually a life-long passion for international questions, openness to the diversity of humankind and a sense of responsibility in solving global problems.

The effectiveness of different types of peace work should be debated more. Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are central figures of not only pacifism but also of world history, and the reason is clear: they were pacifists who spent a lot of time



analysing, making strategies, planning and weighing different options. Many different types of peace work are needed, but the early experiences of children seem to be the most crucial. In one of his lectures, peace educator Colman McCarthy asked the audience how many of them went to a high school where they taught courses in conflict resolution or peace studies. No hands went up. McCarthy's conclusion from this is clear: "*If this was a peace-loving, peace-seeking, peace-building and a peace-affirming society, every hand would have gone up.*" It is easy to agree with his demand: peace studies should be part of the core curriculum, and should include the philosophy of peace, the writings of the great peace leaders, and nonviolent conflict resolution. This is the way forward; we need to take peace work seriously.

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## INFORMAL LEARNING AND CIVIC DIPLOMACY AROUND THE BREAKFAST TABLE

*Karim Maïche*

Many non-governmental organizations (NGO) functioning in Finland today are struggling against racial prejudices. The Finnish Peace Committee, *Suomen Rauhanpuolustajat*, has been active in organizing action against all forms of racist ideologies and discrimination. Racism and racial discrimination can be considered tricky, clever and artful phenomena that change form over the course of time. Although today we may not value and differentiate human beings directly by their ethnic background or race, indirect connotations of culture and cultural background have enabled such distinctions. In helping to improve the coexistence of people from different cultural backgrounds in societies and to help newcomers integrate, one cannot neglect the importance of endeavours and activity against racism and racial discrimination in its different forms.

In addition to organizing exhibitions and events against racism, the main goal of the Finnish Peace Committee, as a peace movement, is to promote peace, disarmament, tolerance, human rights and global equality in general. For us, peace not only means an absence of war but is also seen and understood more broadly. Although our main task is to construct peaceful and equal social environments in all forms and to inform citizens as well as decision makers about different conflicts around the world, I stress that questions related to racism, racial discrimination and wider cultural understanding are integrated into our action.

My aim in the following article is to highlight the significance of the informal learning from other cultures and customs in daily life as part of our information campaigns regarding the Western Sahara and Swaziland in the context of civic diplomacy. Learning from our guests in informal situations as well as having possibilities to construct personal relationships among peoples from other parts of the world helps us to increase cultural networking and mutual understanding of each other. In this short

article I will present a few examples of how we can deepen the relationships and understanding of others and ourselves in our daily routines. I will share some experiences concerning the circumstances of daily life with our Sahrawi and Swazi guests.

### **Finnish Peace Committee and civic diplomacy**

The Finnish Peace Committee, founded in 1949, is a politically and religiously non-committed NGO. Our goal is to promote peace, disarmament, tolerance, human rights, and global equality. Our operations are based on humanitarian, anti-war ideals that emphasize common responsibility on an international scale. We consider social justice and a healthy environment to be important factors for the security of the population. The Finnish Peace Committee aims to reach its goals through organizing various events and activities (seminars, movie nights, demonstrations, concerts, etc.), both by itself and in co-operation with other Finnish peace-promoting societies, as well as other NGOs. The most important information channel for our association is the magazine *Rauhan Puolesta* (Pro Peace), a culturally informed news magazine published six times a year. We participate in public discussions on social issues by publishing literature and arranging public discussion events all over Finland.

By civic diplomacy I mean improvement of the communication and relationships between different actors by allowing informal meetings and dialogue across borders via common projects. The Finnish Peace Committee has a few focus areas in its international work. I have been involved with the campaigning related to the conflicts in Western Sahara in Northern Africa and Swaziland in Southern Africa. Both countries are ruled by absolute monarchies. Our aim is to raise awareness of these conflicts because they have been widely neglected in the mainstream media. Despite the fact that the international community is committed to the promotion of human rights, freedom and democracy, it often appears that in reality these objectives seem to be concretely visible only on paper. There is undeniable evidence that human rights violations are systematically neglected when the interests of ruling powers are at risk. Our goal is to provide the decision makers and other essential societal actors in Finland with information and to have an impact on Finnish foreign policy in the context of the European Union and United Nations. Despite our efforts at objectivity in the analysis of conflicts, we can nonetheless take a stance on

emerging issues, and in Palestine and Western Sahara, for example, we clearly see one party as the occupier and the other as the occupied. Nevertheless, we believe that every conflict should be resolved by peaceful means via dialogue between the parties in accordance with international law.

Western Sahara has often been called Africa's last colony and it is witnessing the longest post-colonial conflict on the continent. Western Sahara was colonized by Spain in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was put on the United Nations list of non-self-governing territories in 1963. Spain had promised the country independence, but Morocco occupied it in 1975 immediately after Spain withdrew from the territory. The occupation has been condemned in numerous UN Security Council resolutions as well as by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). After the Moroccan occupation, the Sahrawi national liberation movement Polisario Front proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) with an exiled government near the Tindouf refugee camps in Algeria, where thousands of Sahrawi refugees fled to escape the atrocities committed by the Moroccan forces, and waged a war of independence against the Moroccan occupiers. The war ended in a 1991 UN-sponsored ceasefire agreement that included a promise to organize a referendum for independence. SADR is a full member of the African Union and has been recognized by over 80 countries, whereas no country has recognized Moroccan sovereignty over occupied Western Sahara. Due to the rich natural resources of Western Sahara, Morocco has been able to sign deals with numerous multinational companies, guaranteeing support from major international powers such as France and the United States. Both superpowers were indifferent towards the inclusion of human rights monitoring in the Minurso peace keeping operation in April 2013.

The kingdom of Swaziland is another absolute monarchy. The king, Mswati III, rules by ordinance over his one-million subjects, most of whom suffer from extreme and chronic poverty. About 70 per cent of the Swazis live below the poverty line, whilst HIV/AIDS has reduced life expectancy to only 32 years. Swaziland has the most severe level of HIV infection in the world. Mswati III has been in power since 1986, succeeding his father, King Sobhuza II, who abandoned the constitution in 1973 and banned political parties. The king has several wives and lives in luxury. Great Britain, the former colonial power,

has been a vocal supporter of the kingdom on the international scene, showing indifference to the brutality of the regime, the banning of political parties and the trade unions' campaign for democracy and human rights.

In recent years, the Finnish Peace Committee has invited dozens of representatives of the Polisario Front and PUDEMO (The People's United Democratic Movement), which is a political movement committed to the creation, protection and promotion of constitutional multi-party democracy and transparent and accountable government in Swaziland. One might ask what importance Western Sahara or Swaziland have regarding the international community and, accordingly, our aim has been to show via these widely neglected struggles how international law is systematically and opportunistically ignored in the face of economic interests.

### **Informal learning**

Informal learning can take place outside educational establishments, such as in one's home or workplace and through daily interactions. The process is mostly unconscious, often spontaneous and not planned in advance. It is frequently assumed that most learning occurs in informal conditions and in the Finnish Peace Committee we often accommodate our guests in our homes, believing that we can learn much more in natural daily conditions and situations. My intention is not to underestimate the value of the information during formal presentations, although I would like to stress the importance of informal situations such as conversations in public traffic and around a breakfast or supper table. Situations such as cooking together increase confidence building and permit discussion of tricky topics and sometimes bring out questions that would not appear in formal events. In addition, we have noticed that foreigners appreciate the opportunity to stay in the homes of native Finns and thus experience the genuine lifestyle of the local people and discover our way of life rather than have superficial surface touches of our society.

The longer visits by various representatives give possibilities for deeper cultural and personal understanding. It is interesting to reflect on the visiting individuals and the conflicts more broadly. At times, we have a tendency to see these visitors as perfect superhuman heroes and to forget that they are normal human beings with ordinary

aspirations and expectations of life and the future. Given time, we can get to know our guests, and their strengths and weaknesses, more deeply. Of course, it may have an effect on the way we generalize the behaviour of these individuals in the overall development of the conflicts. Every individual is different and we have to be ready to face and deal with various personalities and world views. As an example, if we see that there are some values that do not fit into our ideological vision, we can, and often do, easily generalize these individuals as stereotypical of their cultural backgrounds. We also often assume they reflect their populations as a whole - which, of course, is not the case. Every individual is different. Equally different.

To our Finnish audience at formal events, seminars or meetings, Sahrawi women present a unique sight in their colourful garments and melfha headscarves. In some cases, a meeting with a black Swazi man or woman may also turn out to be an essential cultural experience. Presentations from our guests give us unique possibilities to hear about the latest developments in conflict areas. However, it is often the discussion after the presentation or the informal dialogue after the event that offers the best possibilities for the exchange of experiences and ideas between people.

### **Cultural encounters**

Next, I will present a few examples: the visits of the Sahrawis and the Swazis who came to Finland to promote their struggles for independence and better living conditions. Sometimes our guests are highly profiled political actors; sometimes they work as activists in the sphere of civil society. It is sometimes easier to get to know the activists than the politicians. Activists may share information about their personal lives more openly, while politicians tend to be more silent and distant. Politicians seem more protective of their private lives and concentrate more on asking questions than giving answers. It is natural that politicians look for contacts that can benefit their actions more concretely, whereas civil society activists often network more widely. Hence informal situations offer more natural settings for conversation and familiarizing oneself with the visitor.

Polisario, as the official representative of Western Sahara, has a long history and sophisticated experience of international work around the globe. Their representatives are



mostly well educated and professional diplomats who have been in many different places before coming to Finland. Western Sahara is considered a broadly open-minded Islamic society, where men and women play an equally important role. This is easily noticed in the way women can interrupt men who are speaking and vice versa; not a common practice in many Islamic countries. Due to religious emphasis, certain issues are taboo. Conversations related to sexuality or sexual relations are rare. There was an occasion when a dozen Moroccans disrupted one of our events and threatened to sexually abuse a female representative. She never elaborated on the details when the events of that day were discussed later, mentioning only that she was menaced by Moroccans.

When planning to eat with our Sahrawi guests, one should remember that alcohol and pork, normally openly presented in Finland, are out of the question. Sometimes halal meat is required or our guests simply choose to eat fish or vegetarian food. Representatives usually tend to underscore their own culture, knowing that they are under observation by others. Regardless, one typical characterization regarding Sahrawis is that they tend to walk very slowly due to the hot Saharan climate in the refugee camps near Tindouf. When the temperature rises close to 50 degrees, one learns to save energy by slowing down, whereas we in Finland tend to walk rather fast in the winter time. To avoid being late, we have learned to set aside enough time to shift from one meeting to another with Sahrawis.

The international work of the Swazi democratic movement is modest compared to that of Western Sahara. The movement is less cohesive and even quarrelsome, which prevents it from forming a solid and unified representation. They have learned a lot from South Africa's African National Congress (ANC). Swazis sing revolutionary songs before and during every meeting. At one event in Kuopio, a friend of mine had a guitar with him and played a song that he had composed. The Swazi guest was very pleased and in turn sang Swazi songs and taught us a few of the songs they sing during demonstrations. These songs have special meanings during the demonstrations to inform the participants about the movements of the police and to organize the protesters. Men and women speak openly about sexual issues, which are not as taboo. Sometimes we are compelled to notice and learn things about our own society that we are more or less blind to, such as the frequent nudity of Finnish statues as espied and reported by one Swazi representative.

The democratic movement protests an old annual tradition in Swaziland called umhlanga (the Reed Dance ceremony), where tens of thousands of unmarried and childless Swazi girls are forced to dance half naked in front of the middle-aged king, who usually chooses a new wife from among them.

These small details can help us to understand and learn each others' customs and habits. Comparing different conflicts is also illuminating due to the differences in living conditions in Western Sahara and Swaziland. Despite this, it is important to bear in mind that imposition in the behaviour of an individual member of a group of human beings or a culture in general may easily lead us to the categorization of human beings. That may lead, as Amartya Sen underlines, to a situation where "our shared humanity gets savagely challenged when the manifold divisions in the world are unified into one allegedly dominant system of classification – in terms of religion, or community, or culture, or nation, or civilization (treating each as uniquely powerful in the context of that particular approach to war and peace)" (Sen 2006, xiii-xiv).

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## **BLOGGING & WEB 2.0 AS A TOOL IN THE MEDIA WAR**

*Ari Rusila.*

### **Introduction**

Blogging is a part of the social media and Web 2.0 environment. While the first-stage web mainly included websites where people were limited to passive viewing of the content, the new-generation Web 2.0 creates highly interactive platforms that allow the creation of user-generated content, discussion and sharing in the virtual community. Besides blogging, the social media includes social networking sites (Facebook, LinkedIn...), microblogs (e.g. Twitter), wikis (Wikipedia, Wikimedia, Wikileaks...), video sharing sites (e.g. YouTube), folksonomies (social bookmarking, tags) and other web applications (e.g. JavaScript). In conclusion, Web 2.0 has created a totally new level for communication between organizations, communities and individuals, far from the still-existing traditional and industrial media.

I have been blogging<sup>1</sup> for over five years and have used some other social media applications for a few years. I have average computer and Internet skills, but programming is beyond my ability. So my experience of using social media is much the same as any ordinary citizen and not at any kind of expertise level. As my blog covers issues such as conflicts, crisis management and geopolitics - and regionally, the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and MENA (the greater Middle East and North Africa) regions - I describe my experiences of the social media from that perspective. Another aspect should also be mentioned: I try to have blog articles with a message; in general, I take a position, describe a conflict from my perspective and give arguments for it. As my motto is “the other side of the story”, I never claim that my articles are neutral, or an academic description of different issues – the printed media and broadcasts can more or less pretend to have that kind of approach. In my opinion, when a reader compares my provocative or biased post with information collected from the mainstream media, he or she can get a more comprehensive picture of the related issues or events.

## Web updated the media war

The traditional media has had a role in wars and international conflicts for at least a hundred years, e.g. during the Armenian genocide it had some influence on the small humanitarian aid from the U.S. and afterwards influenced the trials against the perpetrators in Turkey. However, it was not until a half-century ago that it came clear that media hype can be far more effective than military combat success - as the Vietnam War amply demonstrated. It is said that Vietnam was the first conflict waged and won by the U.S. media.

The civil war in Yugoslavia lifted the media war to a more professional level when Croatian, Bosnian Muslim and Kosovo Albanian separatists employed PR firms to get U.S. public opinion and political leaders on their side, while the Serbs totally ignored the importance of the media. This proved to be a fatal Serb error in twentieth century hostilities, where public relations and media hype can be far more effective than military combat success. Barry Lituchy hit the nail on the head with these sentences<sup>2</sup>:

*“It is said that the first casualty of war is the truth. Of course, today with the appalling spectacle of the civil war in Yugoslavia filling our TV screens and newspapers, this old axiom has taken on an uglier, more sinister meaning. If four years ago we could say that the American public was totally uninformed about the conflict ready to unfold, today we can say with equal justification that Americans are doubly or triply misinformed, and dangerously so, about this tragic and completely unnecessary war.”*

Referring to the Yugoslav civil wars, Barry Lituchy describes the methods as follows<sup>3</sup>:

*“All public relations firms working for foreign governments must register with the Justice Department. I found in documents obtained from the Justice Department that while Croatia was contracted to pay Ruder Finn \$16,000 a month and Bosnia was to pay \$12,000 in 1992, payments in some later months were as high as \$200,000, and total payments per year were ultimately in the millions of dollars.*

*Moreover, Ruder Finn was not the only P.R. firm employed in Bosnia. Hill and Knowlton was also contracted early in the war. Waterman & Associates was employed by Croatia. Financial backing came from countries such as Saudi Arabia, which alone funneled nearly \$1 billion to the Sarajevo regime from 1993 to 1996, according to the Washington Post, 2 February 1996. Ruder Finn was also contracted by the non-existent "Republic of Kosovo" for \$5,000 a month, according to a Justice Department document dated 1 November 1992."*

The outcome of this demonizing anti-Serb campaign was so effective that there was no market for stories by a journalist who discovered that the reported Serbian "rape camps" did not exist, or who included information about Muslim or Croat crimes against Serbs. Challenging the dominant interpretation in the major media became increasingly impossible.

Two decades ago the role of the average citizen with regard to printed or broadcast media was still passive; with social media the situation totally changed to the opposite – ordinary people can be creative through interactive media. The new trend in the present decade seems to be the 'Internet revolution'. One of the first examples of this was way back in 2001 when the Filipinos famously overthrew their government with the help of text messaging. The latest example of the use of social media in the context of catastrophes or terrorist acts comes from the U.S., where, immediately after the bombs had exploded during the Boston marathon (Spring 2013), tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands or even millions, of social media users began to comb through still and video images from the explosion sites, like so many self-deputized CIA agents. These instant vigilantes not only shared images and theories on Reddit, Imgur, Tumbler and countless blogs but also fingered (innocent) suspects, most of them dark-skinned, as potential terrorists.

The use of social media in present day conflicts can be seen from a few examples I have studied or participated in in different roles (as a neutral observer, as writing articles from the grassroots level perspective or as an active participant in the virtual media war).

### Case Moldova - Twitter revolution (4,5)

After the Orange (Ukraine), Rose (Georgia) and Tulip (Kyrgyzstan) revolutions, the first attempt at a next-generation demonstration took place in Moldova after the 2009 parliamentary elections. Known now as “The Twitter Revolution” the protest was organized by two youth movements – Hyde Park and ThinkMoldova – using their generation’s social messaging network to gather 10,000-15,000 demonstrators on the streets in Moldova’s capital Chisinau at an event billed as “I am a not a Communist”, which included ransacking the presidential palace and parliament building.

As many as 50% of the eligible Moldovan voters cast their votes for the Communist Party (PCRM). Thus the ruling party won a landslide victory, leaving the other three political parties that made it to parliament far behind. Three other parties managed to pass the 6% threshold required to enter the legislature. All three are in favour of closer ties with the European Union, free-market policies and pursuing NATO membership. The Communists (PCRM) are pro-EU, anti-NATO and less market-friendly.

Election observers from the EU and OSCE accepted<sup>6</sup> the voting as fair, though they expressed some concern about interference from the authorities. But the results were a deep disappointment in the capital. Expectation of change was in the air before the voting, but that did not happen.

On the other hand, the demonstration has been characterized in discussion forums (by government supporters perhaps?) as an act where

*“youth, paid by older internationally-acting manipulators with money, alcohol and drugs, seized a presidential office, planted a Romania’s flag on a president palace and set on fire country’s parliament, demanding inclusion as a province in Romania.”*

Natalia Morar, one of the leaders of ThinkMoldova<sup>7</sup>, described the effort in her blog as “six people, 10 minutes for brainstorming and decision-making, several hours of disseminating information through networks, Facebook, blogs, SMSs and e-mails.” She said the protests organized under the slogan were organized online: “All the organization was through the Internet, and 15,000 people came on to the street.”

To create a demonstration via social media was easy, but to have a common view of its purpose and manage the crowd seems to have been problematic. That the demonstration turned violent was a surprise to the activists. Mr. Moscovici said the protests were never intended to turn in that direction. “The situation got beyond any expectations,” he said. “If it would have been planned in advance, they would have used Molotov cocktails or other bad stuff. Today they didn’t have any tools to fight back. The stones they got from the ground, from the pavement.” Ms. Morar of ThinkMoldova also distanced her organization from the violence, shifting the blame onto the opposition parties. What bothers her the most, she said, is the suggestion that she and her friends somehow contributed to the violence, which she watched on television. “Believe me, there is nothing at all enjoyable about it,” she said<sup>8</sup>.

ThinkMoldova gives an example of how a debate can be brought to the street level. One problem is manipulation by the media, etc, which is a common phenomenon in political actions, as well hijacking a demonstration for the purpose of one interest group. In the Moldova case, the two organizations behind the protest condemned the violence and were of the opinion that the opposition parties were behind these acts. The opposition parties deny this and of course it is possible that the Establishment orchestrated the hooligan part of the demonstration to weaken the NGOs. The truth – I don’t know.

The Moldovan experiment showed that Twitter has made some difference since the demonstrations in Ukraine 2004 and Belorussia 2006, which were mainly organized with SMS. It is practical and effective, but from my point of view not a sufficient method for democratic revolution. For protest certainly, for revolution maybe, sometime, somewhere.

### **Arab Streets: Social media gave good start and bad follow-up**

The uprisings and revolutions on the Arab streets a couple of years ago clearly demonstrated the force of the social media in the early stages of those events. A sort of warm-up to the recent cyber war came with the release of a number of *US diplomatic cables on Tunisia*<sup>9</sup> by WikiLeaks in late November and early December 2010. The cables gave details about the “Family Mafia” led by the Tunisian President. A Lebanese news website that published the cables, Al-Akhbar, was blocked in Tunisia and attacked by hackers. The political campaign on the Internet escalated with *Operation Tunisia*<sup>10</sup> (an



open letter to the media, a request for help from journalists, bloggers and hackers) in which activists targeted government sites with Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks. The hackers also got their Open Letter onto the main page of the Government of Tunisia website. During critical days, the social media have been used to help get people out on the streets.

In Egypt the social media played a decisive role by bringing the protest onto the streets. Anonymous leaflets<sup>11</sup> - *How to Protest Intelligently* – circulating in Cairo also provided practical and tactical advice for mass demonstrations, confronting riot police, and besieging and taking control of government offices. The leaflet asked recipients to redistribute it by email and photocopying, but not to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter, which were being monitored by the security forces.

While the social media was so effective during the uprisings, its role became insignificant immediately after the change of regime. Traditional, better organized religious groups got an almost landslide victory over different “ad hoc” temporary action groups. It seems that with Tweet and FB it is difficult to create any deeper group identity, common vision or commitment.

### **Iran: Unsuccessful Green revolution, but successful cyber war**

The “green revolution” in Tehran started after the elections in the summer of 2009. The Western media relied on its reporters covering the mass demonstrations by opposition supporters. The most news coverage came from Tehran via English-speaking students - the bulk of the opposition demonstrators were drawn from the upper and middle-class students, business and professional classes.

From the post-election surveys it can be seen that the only demographic groups where the opposition candidate Mousavi was leading or competing with Ahmadinejad were the university students and graduates, and the highest-income Iranians. This group had the language skills, equipment and skills for using the social media for their purpose. But relying on them as a source of information gives a totally false picture about the grassroots level in Iran as, according to surveys, only one-third of Iranians have access to the Internet. Commentators portrayed Iranian youth and the Internet as harbingers of change in the 2009 election, whereas in reality, 18-to-24-year-olds comprised the

strongest voting bloc for Ahmadinejad.

While distributing real-time tweets and pictures of the “revolution”, the Western media totally ignored and downplayed the huge turnout for Ahmadinejad. Worse still, the Western media ignored the class composition of the competing demonstrations – the fact that Ahmadinejad was drawing his support from the far more numerous poor working class, peasant, artisan and public employee sectors while ignoring the provinces, small and medium sized cities and villages where Ahmadinejad had his mass base of support.<sup>12, 13</sup>

Later, when the core problem (information coming from English-speaking students and highest income class) of the social media as a source of information was clear, and to give a deeper view, I published the traditional information from the Iranian opposition and, especially, from a group named The Organization of Iranian People’s Fadaian (Majority) – in Persian: سازمان فدائیان خلق ایران اکثریت Sāzmān-e fedaiyān-e khalq-e Irān (aksariat) – which is the largest socialist party in Iran and advocates the overthrow of the Islamic regime there. The group is banned from open activity within the Islamic Republic, and works clandestinely inside Iran and openly abroad. I published their letter to EU leaders<sup>14</sup> as such, and their other letter<sup>15</sup> to President Obama related to a planned Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities as, in my opinion, their wise words reflected the grassroots attitude among the Iranian opposition

While social media like Twitter at a regional/local level can be a decisive factor by encouraging the masses to throw out an existing regime, one should remember that the stakes are on a different scale in a real cyber war. The best examples are the introduction of the Stuxnet computer virus into 30,000 computers in Iran’s nuclear reactors and the explosions in October 2009 in which 18 Iranian technicians were killed at a factory in the Zagros mountains that manufactured Shihab missiles.<sup>16</sup>

### **Israel: The most sophisticated use of social media as a tool of war**

The old tradition (called also Pallywood) in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been the use of some respected media, such as the BBC, to show “Israel’s aggression” and, at the same time, Palestinians as innocent civilian victims. During earlier conflicts it was usual to bring the dead – anyone who had died or been murdered for reasons of crime during

these wars - out from the hospitals in front of the cameras as victims of “Israel’s aggression”. This kind of media war is still continuing on the Internet. The difference with the old times is that while it is easy to create and publish (mis)information, it is just as easy for the public to detect photo manipulations and other fabrications.

During the Israeli Pillar of Defence operation against Hamas terrorists in Gaza, an Arab news site called Alarab Net released a photo<sup>17</sup> that shows a family who were allegedly ‘massacred’ in Gaza on its Facebook page on Sunday, 18 November 2012. The caption in Arabic roughly translates into English as “martyred massacred family in Gaza shortly before...” Thanks to Tazpit News Agency’s investigative work, it was found that the photo had originally been published on a news site called Moheet based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, one month earlier, 19 October 2012. On the Moheet website, the photo<sup>18</sup> was entitled “Syria killed 122 Friday...Assad Used Cluster Bombs.”

Trevor Asserson in *YNetNews*<sup>19</sup>:

*“The only force in the Middle East that can beat the Israeli army is a bunch of ragged reporters. Had it not been for the fear of world opinion the Army would have rooted out Hamas and its rockets... World opinion matters because Israel’s natural friends are democracies. Politicians in democracies will follow public opinion. In today’s digital world, where people can communicate across the world in seconds and access information anonymously from their own homes, the internet is the new battlefield. The BBC, with its halo of ‘impartiality,’ is the world leader in dissimulation. The BBC aired dead Syrian children passed off as Palestinians; a ‘badly injured victim of Israeli bombing’ was filmed moments later walking around healthily. The BBC shrugged it off – “perhaps he just recovered quickly.”*

A couple of years ago, the General Staff of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) established a Cyber Defense Division in the C4I Directorate, which is responsible for protecting the IDF networks from hackers and infiltrations, to combat this new virtual frontier. While modern cyber warfare is more between skilled specialists, the information war in the social media is possible for anyone who has some kind of equipment and

access to the web.

In my opinion, the most sophisticated use of social media as tool of war is the official blog of the Israel Defense Forces (IDFBlog)<sup>20</sup>. This is a source of information where one can find news from the field, including operational updates, photos and videos. Besides news, the IDF blog also includes wide background information and facts about related issues via different means (images, videos, FB discussions, interactive means, contacts ...) and in many languages. The IDF are using Twitter as a means of making conflict, and their part in it, as transparent as possible. They are letting the world know exactly what they are doing, as well as *why* they are doing it. I think this is incredibly important as Israel is too easily cast in the role of “the bully” by the mainstream press abroad.

Besides blogging, the IDF also work with Facebook<sup>21</sup>, YouTube<sup>22</sup>, Twitter<sup>23</sup> and Flickr<sup>24</sup>.

As not all people have access to the social media, Israel has also used old-fashioned methods such as aircraft dropping leaflets in Gaza stating that the residents should “keep their distance from Hamas terror operatives”. There were similar warnings via Twitter. The reason for this kind of early warning was to minimize collateral damage (very bad for the public image) in any conflict.<sup>25</sup>

A very good example of how the IDF information unit works with the social media is its actions 14 November 2012, when Operation Pillar of Defence was starting: in the morning, around 9:30 a.m. Eastern time, @IDFSpokesperson tweeted that “The IDF has begun a widespread campaign on terror sites & operatives in the #Gaza Strip, chief among them #Hamas & Islamic Jihad targets.” Minutes later they tweeted<sup>26</sup>, “The first target hit, minutes ago, was Ahmed Al-Jabari, head of the #Hamas military wing.” The tweet linked to a post on the IDF blog<sup>27</sup> that explained: “The purpose of this operation was to severely impair the command and control chain of the Hamas leadership, as well as its terrorist infrastructure.”...“The IDF will continue to target sites that are used for carrying out terror attacks against the citizens of Israel while improving their daily security.” Soon after, a video of the IDF Pinpoint Strike on Ahmed Jabari<sup>28</sup> hit YouTube, where it has accrued over 800,000 views so far (despite being blocked and reinstated by YouTube)<sup>29</sup>. On the opposition’s side, the Alqassam Brigades<sup>30</sup> have been live-tweeting

their attacks on Israel as well - e.g. during Operation Pillar of Defence, tweeting the news of rockets being fired at different cities in Israel every few minutes.

## **Web 2.0 As a Tool - My conclusions**

*“The Egyptian autocrats removed the Internet from Egypt; the Chinese autocrats removed Egypt from the Internet” (an anonymous quote from a web forum)*

The Web 2.0 revolution created a collective consciousness over the Internet, and, in addition, the social media also made it possible for large numbers of people to organize and, in certain cases create, attacks against the establishment – in the virtual or real sphere. The social media is different from the traditional/industrial media in many ways, such as quality, reach, frequency, usability, immediacy and permanence. A Web 2.0 site may allow users to interact and collaborate with each other in the social media. This new Internet culture reflects the fact of, or is a process by which, the centre of gravity of the news cycle has shifted to the social media. The critical task is, of course, criticism of the sources, so that what seems like complete democratization of information and news reporting can lead to a tyranny of the mob, even erupting into “virtual” and perhaps even physical violence.

Today’s communication tools are providing new aspects for election campaigns and politics in general. One of them is that modern technology can inspire young voters. Another aspect is that protest is not necessarily channelled via voting but through street democracy.

One can claim that both of these aspects can include undemocratic elements because the majority of the population are not familiar with these tools and directing democracy with violence can gain more than a fair share of power. On the other hand, one can claim that the Establishment has such strong means with which to exercise power that normal elections are insignificant. My position is not clear, because the situation is different in every society.

Web 2.0 has been excellent tool with which to mobilize huge segments of the population with “Colour revolutions” or uprisings. However, the problems start after the demonstrations or even when the regime changes. After changing the regime or ousting a

dictator, any further goals are rarely discussed and accepted by the mobilized demonstrators. Indeed, the real aims – labelled the promotion of democracy - can be imported abroad to serve foreign interests (like pro-American economic and foreign policies on Arab streets) or at least one leading domestic interest group. So, in my opinion, the criticism is the core question from this aspect.

I do not think the Western traditional mainstream media are so interested in in-depth critical analysis or investigations, which are a threat for advertising money or other publishers' interests. The Internet is an excellent medium for alternative critical citizen journalism and even investigative journalism. Speaking about today's whistle-blowers – the most famous being WikiLeaks – it may be the only medium where these kinds of actions are possible. One can, of course, find a lot of nonsense and what I call Facebook journalism on the Internet. I personally prefer more op-ed articles, alternative perspectives, etc, with good links to background information. In blogging I have changed my approach from daily commentaries to longer and not-so-frequent articles.

I think that at best, the social media can challenge the existing system, policy and initiatives by looking behind the picture from the mainstream media and finding the core interests in ongoing and coming (e.g. Israeli strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, military intervention in Syria, etc) interventions, conflicts and high-flown statements, and investigate how the actions are implementing the interests of different lobby groups. The blogosphere can tell what's really happening and why. The blogosphere can liberate us and our thinking from the mainstream media box. It delivers a huge amount of information and raw material from different shareholders. The critical task is criticism of the sources, but even with this reservation it makes a real change as a virtual think tank - far more than the traditional media.

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### **Excerpt: Ari Rusila - My Blogosphere**

My motivation for blogging originates from my experience of working in the Balkans. While working in the Balkans I saw a huge gap between the mainstream media and reality, and between high-flown ideas from Washington and Brussels from one side and

the grassroots from the other. To change the situation I started to write e-mails and memorandums to policy-makers and comments to different forums – although the response was modest at best. Then I went to different web forums and started blogging, and got much more feedback. My motto is “The other side of the story”.

My main blog is Ari Rusila's BalkanBlog<sup>31</sup>, which covers issues relating to conflicts, crisis management and geopolitics, and regionally the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and MENA (the greater Middle East and North Africa) regions. The content of the blog is more in-depth analysis or essays from my personal viewpoint on topics mentioned, not daily posts about current events. The main blog has visitors from more than 140 countries, mostly from North America.

There is a Finnish version of the main blog with a little different content: Ari Rusilan BalkanBlog<sup>32</sup>. I also launched a news portal, Ari Rusila's Conflicts, where real-time news on different topics was automatically generated from different sources - but no more, as the service provider ended this option. Then there is Themes of Ari Rusila<sup>33</sup>, which includes some minicourses for e-learning purposes. This site is still partly under construction. In addition to this, there is a more static website, Ari Rusila WebS<sup>34</sup>. I also participate in a number of community blogs with the same content as my main blog but with a different audience.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> See “Excerpt: My Blogoshere”

<sup>2</sup> The Spectator (<http://www.iacenter.org/bosnia/lituchy.htm>)

<sup>3</sup> The Spectator (<http://www.iacenter.org/bosnia/lituchy.htm>)

<sup>4</sup> More in Twitter revolution – no coup d’etat but big drama anyway  
(<http://arirusila.wordpress.com/2009/04/19/twitter-revolution->) and

<sup>5</sup> Twitter Revolution-Case Moldova (<http://arirusila.wordpress.com/2009/04/10/twitter-revolution->)

<sup>6</sup> OSCE report ([http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2009/04/37142\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2009/04/37142_en.pdf) )

<sup>7</sup> Source NYT

([http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/europe/08moldova.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/europe/08moldova.html?_r=0))

<sup>8</sup> Source NYT

([http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/europe/08moldova.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/08/world/europe/08moldova.html?_r=0) )

<sup>9</sup> ([http://213.251.145.96/origin/19\\_0.html](http://213.251.145.96/origin/19_0.html))

<sup>10</sup> (<http://www.pdf-archive.com/2011/01/04/an-open-letter-to-all-media/an-open-letter-to-all-media.pdf>)

<sup>11</sup> ([http://assets.theatlantic.com/static/mt/assets/science/assets\\_c/2011/01/Page%201\\_rev2-thumb-600x424-41204.jpg](http://assets.theatlantic.com/static/mt/assets/science/assets_c/2011/01/Page%201_rev2-thumb-600x424-41204.jpg)) and

([http://assets.theatlantic.com/static/mt/assets/science/assets\\_c/2011/01/Page%204\\_rev-thumb-600x424-41213.jpg](http://assets.theatlantic.com/static/mt/assets/science/assets_c/2011/01/Page%204_rev-thumb-600x424-41213.jpg))

<sup>12</sup> More in my articles IRAN – revolution postponed

(<http://arirusila.wordpress.com/2009/07/07/iran->) and

<sup>13</sup> Iran – Twitter – Revolution (<http://arirusila.wordpress.com/2009/06/22/iran->)

<sup>14</sup> Support for Iranian Opposition (<http://arirusila.wordpress.com/2011/03/04/support-for-iranian-opposition/>)

<sup>15</sup> US Giving a “Yellow Light” to an Israeli Strike

(<http://arirusila.wordpress.com/2012/03/06/us-giving-a-yellow-light-to-an-israeli-strike/>)

<sup>16</sup> More in my article Cyber war has become a tool between political and military options (<http://arirusila.wordpress.com/2011/01/18/cyber-war-has-became-a-tool-between-political-and-military-options/>)

<sup>17</sup> The “recycled” massacre, transplanted to Gaza. (<http://www.jewishpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/forgery-1.jpg>)

<sup>18</sup> The original massacre, in Syria. <http://www.jewishpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/forgery-21-422x486.jpg> )

<sup>19</sup> (<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4315343,00.html>)

<sup>20</sup> (<http://www.idfblog.com/> )

<sup>21</sup> (<http://www.facebook.com/idfonline> )

<sup>22</sup> (<http://www.youtube.com/idfnadesk> )

<sup>23</sup> (<http://www.twitter.com/idfspokesperson> )

<sup>24</sup> (<http://www.flickr.com/photos/idfonline> )

<sup>25</sup> Minimizing Collateral Damage In Gaza Conflict

(<http://arirusila.wordpress.com/2012/11/20/minimizing-collateral-damage-in-gaza-conflict/>)



<sup>26</sup> (<http://twitter.com/IDFSpokesperson/status/268722815300169729> )

<sup>27</sup> (<http://www.idfblog.com/2012/11/14/idf-begins-widespread-attack-on-terror-sites-in-the-gaza-strip/> )

<sup>28</sup> (<http://youtu.be/P6U2ZQ0EhN4> )

<sup>29</sup> (<http://allthingsd.com/20121115/youtube-blocks-israeli-hamas-assassination-video/>  
<http://allthingsd.com/20121115/youtube-blocks-israeli-hamas-assassination-video/> )

<sup>30</sup> (<http://twitter.com/AlqassamBrigade> )

<sup>31</sup> (<http://arirusila.wordpress.com> )

<sup>32</sup> (<http://arirusila.blogit.fi/> )

<sup>33</sup> (<http://arirusilathemes.wordpress.com/> )

<sup>34</sup> (<http://arirusila.webs.com/> )

## THE DIFFICULT FIRST STEPS IN THE ARAB SPRING

*Risto Veltheim*

The so-called “Arab spring”, now in its third year, is bringing about historic changes to the Middle East and North Africa. It is being closely observed and watched by many in the outside world, sometimes creating fears and worries. The events are definitively taking their own course: the Arab spring itself surprised many experienced observers at the end of 2010, although some warning signs may have been in the air. Also, the way it has turned out in the years following the first events in Tunisia in December 2010 has been difficult to predict, and will remain so.

As experiences from Eastern Europe and elsewhere have shown, political and social reforms on the scale the Arab countries are seeking to achieve is a long and painful process with no quick or miraculous solutions. An early harvest is seldom to be expected.

The very first challenge is that of the peaceful transition process after the collapse of an old regime. Who can be trusted to take care and oversee the transition from autocracy to a representative democracy? Who is to decide about elections, the dates and the ways and means of political participation, and many other immediate issues, which themselves affect and give a direction to future policies and institutions.

How to make a new society?

The problems are acute in all three countries that have overthrown an ancient, authoritarian regime (Tunisia, Egypt and Libya). There are very different political forces claiming ownership of the post-revolution and are now stuck into the problem of formulating a new constitution. This is of course a prerequisite for the first genuine elections to be organized after the revolution. But the interim period, alas, is filled with suspicion, anger and mistrust, mainly due to an acute legitimacy gap and strongly reflecting the constitutional issues.

It is of course important for the different groups and schools of thinking to see that their favourite, most cherished and sometimes sacred ideas are reflected in the new constitution. Yet, in some instances one wonders if the battle over the correct words and

terminology that characterize the constitutional hand-twisting is turning into a futile shadow boxing match. After all, constitutions are mainly supposed to set the basic rules of the functioning of the political bodies. In real life, and when this battle is over, the daily preferences in the political, economic, social and religious matters, as expressed by the people in free elections, seek their own interpretation according to the changing mood of popular opinion.

In fact, re-writing the constitution and redefining *inter alia* the basic values of a multifaceted society would be a highly divisive issue in any democratic country. Yet, in the highly emotional atmosphere of the newly born Arab nations, a mistrust and strong belief in the power of words is playing a central role. This is understandable in a way, but for the sake of a common interest it should not delay or hamper the movement towards a full and functioning democracy.

Before going any further in an analysis of the so-called Arab spring event, we have to remind ourselves how different these countries are in many respects, in spite of a common situation of going through a post-revolutionary reform process or being strongly influenced by it.

Some of them are wealthy countries with high export earnings thanks to considerable oil revenues, like Libya and Algeria. It is obvious that they are not confronting the economic problems others are experiencing with prolonged economic turmoil and social unrest. In Libya in particular, and to large extent in Algeria as well, a state budget with assured regular income is able to secure the immediate daily needs of the population, either with direct transfers or heavy subsidies. The real problem is the unemployment, idleness of the young and lack of over-all development in the society.

The situation in large and densely populated Egypt is unfortunately very different: the political and social turmoil has been detrimental to the economy in many ways, to tourism, investments and even daily business and securing everyday needs. The budget is deeply in the red and the ability to continue subsidizing the daily food and energy needs seems to be at risk. The consequence is a downward spiral, where a lack of stable economic conditions nourishes accelerating political unrest, and vice versa.

In Tunisia, the economic difficulties are also serious, mainly due to losses in tourism income, but the economy has traditionally been more diversified and performing better

than in other North African countries. But in Tunisia too, the real democracy should soon take root and gain the confidence of the population if further deterioration is to be avoided.

In order to function properly, democracy needs to be based on the rule of law, which is to be seen as the basic value in the society. The purpose is to create a society that is trusted by all and is able to ask for sacrifices by the citizens. Together with a well-functioning and vigorous civil society, a vibrant and freely working non-governmental network is vital in order to create and maintain this state of mind. This principle is often, if not generally, accepted, but the realization of it is still far away.

Huge differences also exist in this respect. Some of the Arab spring countries have a certain tradition in forming political parties and having public debate on different issues facing the society. This is the case in most North African states, where an active and professional press has existed, although sometimes under more or less vigilant governmental control.

In Algeria, the press has traditionally been very free and outspoken, although political life has been dominated by a dominant party, FLN, with strong presidential power and some trusted partners in government. In Morocco, on the other hand, the press has suffered from tight control and criticizing the state institution has normally been punished with prison sentences. Yet a political party system has rapidly developed over recent years and the forming of the government is now entrusted to the party winning the elections.

### **The heavy legacy of dictatorship**

Then, at the other end of the road towards democracy we have Libya, a real *sui generis* case. The legacy of Colonel Gaddafi's 40 years of capricious and destructive dictatorship is beyond description. There is no previous legislation worth its name, no credible state institutions, no political parties - obviously - and hardly any political thinking. Not even an embryo of associations of politically like-minded people existed. Everything that happened or did not happen had been decided by the omnipotent Guide of Revolution himself, according to his mood of the day.

The greatest challenge for this country is to create a society from scratch: a new

national framework for organizing public life, a legislative body, a trustworthy executive power and a reliable judicial system. And the people who had served the old regime are not trusted any more, at least at the top of the hierarchy. Even a mentality of revenge and punishment seems to prevail.

Thus the first interim governments created in Libya after the liberation of the country included a strong element of people who had lived and worked abroad. But these people were also regarded with mistrust in some segments of the population inside the country. They have been seen as people who had distanced themselves from the reality of their homeland, who had not “stayed to fight”, or who are trying to bring alien ideas and concepts into Libyan politics.

Thus the Libyan transition faces more challenges than the others. Fortunately, some successes have also been achieved: first and foremost, the well-organized elections of July 2012, with good participation all over the country and results unchallenged by any political party. It is sad that the media in many Western countries focused on isolated incidents, mainly in the eastern part of the country, thus failing to see the overall success that this historical event undoubtedly was – against all the odds.

#### The growing role of the civil society

As we could witness in the first days of the historic events, the energy of the young people has been released all across the Arab World. Having been simple subjects of the power solidly in the hands of the elderly generation for a long time, they are now conscious of their own power and influence.

The importance of Western values is very lively in many debates, but the fact is that the people are nowadays perfectly well informed of the ways in which other countries are organizing their public life. And democracy is a model that is generally seen to be worth pursuing, in spite of all the difficulties in making it work.

Therefore, the reforms being undertaken in the countries of North Africa and the Middle East should focus on genuinely participatory political decision-making processes at all levels of the society and creating equitable economies where the young especially can find decent employment.

On the other hand, an important lesson from the Arab Spring is that marginalized groups and regions cannot be ignored either. In many Arab countries, as in many other

parts of the world, the modernization, new skills and technical revolution has reached big cities and benefitted many young people. At the same time, it has left the rural and suburban areas behind. New and innovative mechanisms should be established to ensure their meaningful participation in the sharing of productive resources and other aspects of the economic, political and cultural life.

Building up and maintaining working democratic systems has always been and still is a great challenge anywhere in the world. Nothing seems to be achieved as guaranteed. In present day Western societies, such issues as money and party-financing, rules of lobbying and influencing political decision-makers, irresponsible populism and short-sightedness of political orientation are at the heart of the debate between the political class and their subordinates.

Yet the building up of democratic rules and institutions in the Arab world faces many challenges that the old Nation States in Europe would not imagine. The first is when the nations are divided by ethnic, racial or religious lines rather than political ideas. These lines are constant and create their own, permanent majorities and minorities, which do not change in elections and may even make the organization of them a futile exercise.

A case in point is Iraq, which has had an opportunity to learn democracy since the American invasion and fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. A fierce battle between the Sunni minority, the old dominant sect, and the Shia majority, the new majority with dominant political power, seems to continue and hardly a day goes by without news of inter-religious violence in all parts of the country.

In Lebanon this problem has been solved by a complicated power sharing formula that is supposed to guarantee a place for all religious factions. Whatever hopes we have for a new post-war Syria once the bloody fighting has ended might have to follow the same lines.

Whatever the solutions are to build a national conciliation, the art of negotiation, dialogue and a spirit of compromise are the new elements that people have to learn in a post-dictatorship situation. But the reward is that people are only motivated to accept difficult reforms if they feel they are included in the decision-making process and united on the need for change.

Democracy is also the best guarantee for human rights. On the other hand, political,

economic and social participation can only be meaningful if human rights and the rule of law are fully respected. This is a fact irrespective of cultural, historical or other particularities.

## **EU and Arab spring**

The Arab world is in the immediate neighbourhood of Europe, and from a European perspective, the stability and prosperity on its southern borders is vital. This strategic relationship, even an interdependence with all its advantages and its challenges, was first established in 1995 when the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership started, better known as the Barcelona Process after the culturally rich Spanish seaside town in which it was launched.

This process (which was merged into the new Union for the Mediterranean in 2008) was not a failure, although the concrete results “on the ground” were not fully satisfactory. In fact, arriving at the 21st century, the Mediterranean was not getting any closer to the “sea of peace, stability and shared prosperity” it was meant to be at the outset.

Dark clouds were gathering in the sky and the gap seemed to be widening between the two shores of Mare nostrum. New realities created by the rapid globalisation of the world economy, with new economic rules, were making their effects rapidly known everywhere. From the very beginning it was clear that the new wave of globalisation would create opportunities and challenges, but would not leave things unchanged.

For all countries and economic actors, the necessity to be competitive on a world scale or stay behind the others is the rule. The Asian markets, being better organised, more disciplinary and strongly linked with North American business life, attracted both investments and manufacturing industry from all parts of the world.

On the social side, the problems started to grow rapidly. Unemployment, in all its forms, was growing due to the adoption of new technologies and new localisation of manufacturing. The young and growing Arab population in particular was hit by this event. Even the tourism, which has always had great potential in the culturally rich Arab world, creating service jobs and boosting artesanía, was facing new competition boosted by cheaper intercontinental flights and sometimes cheaper price levels.

All this resulted in weakening economies and fewer job opportunities in the Arab world. An uncontrolled and growing illegal immigration from North Africa, or from other African countries through North Africa, into the EU area was showing alarming numbers. The sad notion of “boat people”, until then more heard on Haitian waters, became a reality on the Mediterranean.

The EU countries themselves were suffering from tighter job markets, especially for less skilled workers. Weakening social safety nets and rising living and housing costs provoked growing popular tensions. A growing clash between Arab and European values, encouraged by well selling populist arguments, was a direct and inevitable consequence.

This was the background to the ambitious vision of the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, to form a new kind of alliance between the EU and the Mediterranean countries, a Union for the Mediterranean. This new body saw the light when the political leaders of 43 countries gathered in Paris in 2008 for the historic Summit meeting.

Unfortunately, this latest attempt to give new life to the Euro-Mediterranean relationship has not lived up to expectations either. The main obstacle this time is political: as the freeze on building new Israeli settlements in the occupied territories was lifted by the new government after the 2009 elections, the Peace Process for the Middle East was paralysed and, consequently, all high level contacts too.

As the Palestinian Authority had been a full member of the Barcelona process from the beginning, and thus also of UfM, this affected and finally poisoned the political relationship between Israel and the Arab group. No more Summit meetings have been held, not even the Foreign Minister meetings that had always been the opportunity to take stock of the progress and give new impetus to the Euro-Mediterranean cooperation. With the lack of fully fledged political support, the resources have remained modest.

Furthermore, the famous link between public and private resources to increase investments in North Africa has remained modest. Unfortunately, many countries in the Arab world are failing to show the “good investment climate” that private capital so badly needs in order to establish job-creating enterprises.



## **What Finland has done**

It is often stated that it is the people of the Arab countries themselves who should decide where their future lies. This is the basic lesson of the Arab spring, and also the message Finland and the EU want to send. What is needed is the ability to listen to the Mediterranean partners and engage in a genuinely equal partnership. On this basis, we have also offered our support and assistance where and when needed.

The Finnish contribution to assist the transition process in the Arab world for 2012-17 is 42 million euros, shared out in many different areas and different kinds of projects and endeavours.

One of the priorities has been the gender issue, which has been at the heart of the Finnish concept of human development. In our own country, women have played a prominent role in exposing the social evils that had to be dealt with and in finding the means to address them. The lessons we have learned from our history are similar to those that can be derived from the histories of the other Nordic countries. Among the most important is the need to set up specific mechanisms that ensure equal opportunities for all social groups, particularly women, and including education and the economy.

Finland has repeatedly highlighted challenges that women face in today's world. Equal access to justice for women is not only a major human rights issue but a substantial development concern as well. Everyday problems related to women's inheritance rights, land rights, and lack of access to birth and other registration, hinder women's opportunities and keep them in poverty.

One of the examples of the concrete action in this field is the empowerment of women in political life. A case in point was Libya, where women had no experience at all of social organizing, even less of political participation, at the time the first historic elections of July 2012 were announced.

With the support of the Finnish Government, and together with local NGOs, the Finnish organization DEMO organized a special seminar in Tripoli dedicated to "training" women in electoral campaigning. Several high-level Finnish women politicians, including a former Prime minister, participated in this event as role models.

In her support programmes, Finland is also firmly committed to strengthening the rule of law. In the search for durable and sustainable solutions to post-conflict situations,

Finland has been asked to contribute to enhancing the transitional justice. Benefitting from the experience gathered in other parts of the world, Finland sent a team of forensic investigation experts to Libya to assist in dealing with the problem created by tens of thousands of missing persons, mass graves and unknown victims in the restless history of the country.

To improve the role of the news media in societies in transition, Finland supports UNESCO in its work to enhance freedom of expression in the Arab countries. Finland has signed an agreement with UNESCO worth 2.3 million euros for projects in Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia for the years 2013-2016. UNESCO has the mandate and know-how to give support to the newly elected governments, media, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in the countries aiming for changes.

An improved primary health care system and training of new, politically neutral police forces have also been areas in which Finland has been able offer know-how for the construction of new Arab spring societies.

The Arab spring is still an unwritten story, but one thing is certain: it will remain high on the international agenda for a long time. We will see lots of progress and encouraging signs, but we will inevitably see setbacks as well.

But, as Mr. André Azoulay, the President of the Anna Lindh Foundation said at the Marseille Forum in 2013, the bottom line is: “for the first time, the values of dignity, dialogue and democracy are shared by millions, opening a new and promising era where scores of citizens are willing to take their common destiny in their hands.”

One can only wish success to this tremendous new development.



## **PUTTING WORDS INTO DEEDS: RECOGNISING BUT ALSO ACTING TOWARDS THE EMPOWERMENT OF THE EURO-MEDITERRANEAN CIVIL SOCIETY**

***Kati Lepojärvi***

I took part in the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Society Forum in Marseille, France, from 4-7 April 2013. I mainly assisted in the strategic debates, thematic working groups and “best practices/project ideas” sessions concerning democratic development, civil society empowerment and women’s issues. With this article I will try to seize and portray some of the spirit of Marseille; to raise the main topics of discussion as well as the most contentious questions and the most desirable objectives of the current EU-North Africa cooperation, mainly in support of the civil society. To get to the bottom of things, however, a short, rough description as to the sources of this cooperation may come in handy.

### **The roots of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership**

The Barcelona Process was initiated in 1995 and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership took off with high expectations. In the Barcelona Declaration, the Euro-Mediterranean partners established the three main objectives of the partnership: definition of a common area of peace and stability through the reinforcement of political and security dialogue (Political and Security Basket); construction of a zone of shared prosperity through an economic and financial partnership and the gradual establishment of a free-trade area (Economic and Financial Basket); and *rapprochement* between peoples through a social, cultural and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies (Social, Cultural and Human Basket). The partners included an unprecedented list of European, North African and Middle Eastern countries and organisations involved in promoting regional cooperation. In 2005, the Barcelona Summit agreed on a five-year work programme and a ‘Euro-Mediterranean Code of Conduct for Countering Terrorism’, as well as adding migration as a fourth key pillar of

the partnership.

The partnership laid the foundations for an institution building on, but not replacing, the EuroMed Partnership. The EuroMed cooperation agreements were re-launched in 2008 as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which encompasses the 27 EU Member States, the European Commission and 16 Mediterranean countries. The League of Arab States also participates in all meetings at all levels of the Union for the Mediterranean. The Union for the Mediterranean promotes economic integration and democratic reform across 16 neighbours to the EU's south in North Africa and the Middle East.

With the introduction of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004, the Barcelona Process essentially became the multilateral forum for dialogue and cooperation between the EU and its Mediterranean partners, while complementary bilateral relationships were managed mainly under the ENP and through Association Agreements signed with each partner country. The EU works closely with each of its Mediterranean partners to establish support programmes for economic transition and reform that take each country's specific needs and characteristics into account. In 2007 these actions came to be funded under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI).

One of the institutional partners in the EuroMed Partnership is the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures (ALF). It concentrates on people-to-people cooperation, empowering the civil society and enhancing cultural exchanges, understanding and respect. Since its launch in 2005, the Anna Lindh Foundation has initiated and supported action across fields impacting on mutual perceptions among people of different cultures and beliefs, as well as developing a region-wide network of over 4,000 civil society organisations. The Anna Lindh Mediterranean Forum, held in Marseille on 4-7 April 2013, brought together more than 1,500 civil society organisations from 44 countries of the Euro-Mediterranean region. Held under the banner 'Citizens for the Mediterranean', the Forum opened a space for interaction, exchange and debate of the top issues facing the Euro-Med region today, with concrete plans for a better partnership across the region.

## **Criticisms**

The Barcelona Process has had a bumpy ride and has been declared ineffective by some analysts. The stalling of the Middle East Peace Process has had an impact on the Barcelona Process and is hindering progress, especially in the first basket. The economic basket can be considered a success, and cultural exchange projects and people-to-people relations have flourished between both shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Other criticism is mainly based on the predominant role the European Union is playing. Normally it is the EU that is assessing the state of affairs, which leads to the impression that the north is dictating what the south should do. The question of an enhanced co-ownership of the process has repeatedly been brought up over recent years.

Although an excellent platform for north-south-north cooperation, some members are expressing their reluctance to take part in the negotiations by voting with their feet. For instance, according to several research institutions, at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary Euro-Mediterranean summit held in Barcelona on 27–28 November 2005, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were the only leaders from the Mediterranean countries to attend, while those of Israel, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt were not present.<sup>24</sup> Israel has been absent from meetings for the last few years, and Syria more recently. The League of Arab States also froze the membership of Libya in 2011 and Syria in 2012 on a human rights basis.

## **Citizens for the Mediterranean**

The Anna Lindh Foundation's Mediterranean Forum in April introduced an array of civil society experts and high-level representatives of international and regional organisations involved with the EuroMed Partnership as speakers, and brought them together with 1,500 civil society organisation representatives EuroMed-wide to share best practices, make recommendations and develop new partnerships with actors involved in mutual fields or themes of activities. The Forum was successful in bringing together an extraordinary number of participants and top-level speakers, but the partnership building

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.euromed-forum.net/library/library.php?page=pressummit>

may have been somewhat haphazard. The Forum offered little opportunity for concrete partnership-formation, if one does not take into account occasionally bumping into some people among the thousands who happen to share the same work agenda or similar ideas on possible projects and are also seeking partners. There was a non-advertised networking space also available inside the Forum venue, but on a few visits there it seemed quite abandoned.

The discussions were grouped under diverse themes, ranging from cultural traditions and exchanges to archaeological endeavours, to projects aimed at enhancing literacy, to political empowerment, and so forth. I assisted in meetings tackling the strengthening of the civil society, democracy and women's rights. The diversity of the Forum was a remarkable achievement, but at the same time it made it difficult for the participants to follow the multitude of useful working groups taking place simultaneously and to find partners amongst this highly heterogeneous company. In addition, one of the main objectives of the meeting, building partnerships among the civil society actors on both sides of the Mediterranean, was forgotten on some occasions. Drafting recommendations became the *raison d'être* of some meetings for the moderators - dismissing participants' requests for more in-depth debate on some topics - and the conclusions from some groups barely arrived at scratching the surface of some of the core problems discussed. Some participants felt it would have been more worthwhile to organize several thematic meetings to get to the bottom of the Euro-Mediterranean issues at stake. This could be worth a thought in the future.

As far as parliamentary cooperation is concerned, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) is not a new institution inside the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership framework. It was established in Naples on 3 December 2003 by the Euro-Mediterranean Ministers of Foreign Affairs. It has four permanent committees: political affairs, security and human rights; economic, financial and social affairs and education; promotion of the quality of life, human exchanges and culture; and women's rights in the Euro-Mediterranean countries - as well as an ad hoc committee on energy and the environment. Since the launch of the Union for the Mediterranean, the EMPA's role has been strengthened for it is considered the "legitimate parliamentary expression of the Union". The people of the Euro-Mediterranean countries were represented on different

levels in Marseille. On the same occasion of the civil society meeting, the first Summit of the Speakers of Parliaments of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) member countries took place. The summit was held in Marseille on 6 and 7 April 2013. It was convened on the initiative of the President of the European Parliament and the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM, Martin Schulz, and was the first high-level meeting since the Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the UfM held in Paris in 2008 and the first regional meeting since the Arab Spring. In particular, President Schulz underlined that “This summit will be an opportunity to show that parliaments are ready to fill the political leadership gap from which the UfM has suffered in recent years...If the challenge of democratic transition which is under way in some Mediterranean countries is to be met successfully, we will need strong and effective parliaments that listen to their citizens.”<sup>25</sup>

The support and guidance the “old democracies” can provide for their new and emerging counterparts in North Africa should stem from the civil society. This was also affirmed at the Marseille Forum by the representatives both of civil society and international organisations. As President Schulz aspired, parliaments and parliamentarians also have an important role to play in today’s Euro-Mediterranean cooperation field. As an example of a cooperation initiative in this field, in late 2011 the Finnish Committee for European Security - STETE - an organization led by Members of the Finnish Parliament, organized an international conference<sup>26</sup> bringing together women decision-makers and change-makers from North Africa and Finland to discuss and learn from one another. The conference was supported by the Anna Lindh Foundation. The initiative received praise and the participants hoped for a continuation of the project and more permanent fora for dialogue. At the time however, there was no funding available for such cooperation. Fortunately it now seems the tables have turned. Both the Anna Lindh Foundation and the EU have pledged their support for smaller scale projects that could be handled by smaller or emerging CSOs, as well as for longer-term support for successful projects not concentrating only on funding initiatives.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://pam.int/?m=news&id=444> and [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/the-president/en/press/press\\_release\\_speeches/press\\_release/2013/2013-march/html/schulz-convenes-the-first-summit-of-the-speakers-of-the-parliaments-of-the-union-for-the-mediterranean](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/the-president/en/press/press_release_speeches/press_release/2013/2013-march/html/schulz-convenes-the-first-summit-of-the-speakers-of-the-parliaments-of-the-union-for-the-mediterranean)

<sup>26</sup> <http://eng.stete.org/-north-to-north---women-as-agents-of-change.html>



**Continuity of successful Euro-Mediterranean projects ensured by guaranteeing funding for smaller-scale and longer-term projects through tailored programmes**

Since 1995, the European Commission has supported the Barcelona Process with the provision of 16 billion euros from the Community budget. Loans from the European Investment Bank amount to approximately 2 billion euros per year. The EU's commitment to supporting the emerging democracies and civil societies of their EuroMed partners has been reiterated since the loosening of the grip of the all-consuming economic slump. The EU has promised more support and funding for North African societies through, for example, strengthening and facilitating trade exchanges (provided the recipients adhere to the applied conditionality) and offering its traditional and new instruments for the use of its southern partners.

At the Marseille Forum, many of the North African civil society representatives were criticizing the funding offered by the ENPI as being too bureaucratic and unsuitable for the new NGOs born in the midst or aftermath of the Arab revolutions. These newborn organisations often have high hopes and a strong will but lack the power or resources to gain a more permanent standing in their societies, and may even face systematic suppression by their government. According to Hesham Youssef of the League of Arab States, it is difficult for the civil society to achieve its objectives because of restrictions by governments. He added that the League of Arab States has proposed framework changes to facilitate the cooperation framework, but the EU has been reluctant to change the existing structures. He also mentioned the lack of evaluation and impact analysis on the mutual projects as a significant undermining factor in the cooperation.

**EU should walk a mile in North Africans' shoes**

Some of the participants judged the EU policies outright. Vicente Cassese from the Assemblée des citoyens de la Méditerranée laid on the table that the EU policies are still stuck in the 1990s and the Neighbourhood Policy-related Forum for Eastern partnership does not work because of its bureaucracy. Giovanna Tanzarella from the René Seydoux Foundation called for a change in the Europeans' attitude of superiority over Arab countries and claimed: "Listen to them!"

As to the representatives of the Arab countries, Hesham Youssef's wish was that the EU could help in providing the Arab countries with a model of its own development: "The EU has succeeded in reducing the gap between the rich and the poor. We have failed in this." He also observed that the EU neighbourhood policy is not made for North Africa and called for a new framework to handle these relationships. Finally, he criticized the EU for employing double standards in its policy, comparing how the EU has dealt with Libya versus Syria.

Omnia Taha, also from the League of Arab States, gave a solemn statement, praising the progress made in the League's cooperation with the EU. She stated: "Living, freedom, dignity and democracy were demanded in the Arab Spring. We are not gaining the fruits of this courageous effort. The forces that brought the Islamic forces to government have to be respected as democratic choices, but they do not represent the forces that brought about the revolution." Ms Taha was cautious about the great resistance developing to freedom and democracy and the emergent debate asking if democracy is at all compatible with the Islamic States. She said it has become impossible to realize civil society empowerment in countries such as Tunisia, Libya and Morocco. According to Ms Taha, the League put the civil society cooperation at the top of the priorities for cooperation with the EU, but this was rejected by most Arab States. In addition, the countries tried to limit the actions of the civil society to concentrate on, for instance, the environment, not human rights or the role of women. And finally, she lamented the fact that there has not been a change in the Arab regimes and that the revolution is not reflected in the constitutions or laws of these countries. Ms Taha noted that the idea of a civil society and the Arab League opening its doors to a civil society is a new concept. However, there are high expectations for the freedom of the civil society and freedom of expression. For instance, the League has included Arab civil society observers in its own economic and social council. When Ms Taha turned to the relationship with the EU, she clearly stated: "We don't want a teacher-student relationship with the EU, or the attitude implying 'this is the policy - take it or leave it.'" She saw an important role for the Arab League in supporting human rights in the region and appreciated the EU's support in spreading the culture of human rights. Nevertheless, she ended by highlighting that "The priorities of the Arab world are not those of the West. The EU needs to understand our culture better.

We need transparency, and no hidden agenda as some donors have on some civil society funding.”

Anis Boufrikha, a Tunisian civil society representative, noted that Europe could help their counterparts employ the mechanisms they offer without intervening. He underlined the need for EU support in the legislative development of Tunisia to help create legislation that is more open to the civil society because, until now, the civil society has never been included in the drafting of the country’s legislation.

Nabila Hamza from the Tunisian NGO Foundation for the Future made a comprehensive list of recommendations to ameliorate the EU-North Africa exchanges from the civil society’s viewpoint. She claimed that the EU has to take the lead in civil society development in the awakening of the Arab region. She recounted that a huge qualitative and quantitative development of the North African civil society is underway. In just two years, 5,000 new NGOs have been created in Tunisia and 1,000 in Libya. Ms Hamza continued that there is a new generation of CSOs that are emerging and tackling formerly taboo issues, such as gender, elections, etc. The civil society actors are younger and more highly educated, and there are more women investing in civil society development. The CSOs have also developed a strong role in the fields of monitoring elections and fighting corruption – both important building blocks of democracy. What Ms Hamza wanted from the EU was support crafted according to each country separately; reaction and a fast-track system to react quickly and flexibly to changes in the region; small, medium and large grants offered to allow emerging CSOs that cannot support big projects to take part; demand-driven approaches taking local expertise into account; as well as revision and adaptation of the grant-making process to the needs and situation of the country in question. Ms Hamza finalized her recommendations with a plea for a broad spectrum of aid instruments, including political, diplomatic, technical and financial support. She placed special emphasis on support for new think tanks and independent research organisations to help build the expertise of the government from scratch. In conclusion, from the civil society viewpoint, a Lebanese representative added to Ms Hamza’s account that EU project funding should be aimed at activities other than just workshops. She also pinpointed that the North African civil society needs capacity building most of all, including training for students and professionals on how to run an

NGO.

Hugues Mingarelli from the European External Action Service gave a Brussels viewpoint on the cooperation issue and responded to some of the critique raised by the participants and speakers. He agreed that the civil society in the Arab countries needs a new and strong role, and that the forces of the revolution (the youth and women in particular) should be given means to express themselves and to register their organisations without government restrictions. As avenues to help them achieve this, Mingarelli proposed the help of the European Endowment for Democracy<sup>27</sup>, the creation of a civil society forum equivalent to the EU Eastern Neighbourhood Forum and financial aid for these organisations to help them function outside the government.

### **New fields included to ensure coherent society building**

Democracy building must be seen as a comprehensive process including all the building blocks of a functioning society, but also the people, their actions and the effects of their actions. Removing obstacles to trade and enhancing trade relations cannot be done without taking their environmental impact into account and implementing measures to constrain negative effects. Energy projects have also gained ground in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation lately. The requirement for the assessment and mitigation of the environmental impact of economics and policies seems almost self-evident to the EU and there is a strong European demand for the Union to provide only conditional aid to partners – with, for instance, prerequisites for upholding human rights and protecting the environment. Bringing these new elements within the sphere of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation can only be hailed as important steps forward and the generations to come will certainly be appreciative of a more sustainable future. Nonetheless, at the very core of the conditionality lies one of the major potholes on the North-South “silk road”: the EU has been harshly criticized for practising excessive fatherly guidance in relation to their southern counterparts. There can be no Euro-Mediterranean community without equal partnership.

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<sup>27</sup> A fairly new Brussels-based think tank highly valued by the European Commission, among others.

## **Intervention and conditionality necessities problematic**

Giovanna Tanzarella, among other speakers, stated that we are facing a reversal of the Mediterranean dossier and are losing the regional framework. According to Ms Tanzarella, a thorough updating of our means of intervening in the region as well as strong conditionality are currently needed. However, she called for extensive discussions on the levels of the civil society of the partner countries and the substance of the conditions of EU assistance to be applied.

The Marseille Forum brought forward some of the EU's high-ranking policymakers to provide the latest information as well as to answer questions and critique from the civil society representatives present. Hugues Mingarelli affirmed it is in the EU's best interest to offer assistance and guidance to help stabilize its EuroMed partners. He felt the EU's role in supporting its southern partners is best concentrated on:

- Providing effort and the experience the EU has on democratic transformation. The enlargement process of the Union can be very useful as a guide to the countries of North Africa. As an example, in Yemen, peaceful democratic transitions have taken place with advances in freedom of speech. Creating and supporting counterbalances are necessary for the democracy and for the civil society. The EU has made interventions to support these efforts, but also made mistakes in doing so.
- Providing free trade agreements and economic support favouring the economic development of partner countries, lifting restrictions and barriers to exchanges and assistance for partners to develop their own *acquis communautaire*. As far as conditions for the support are concerned, when things don't go in the direction of democracy, and especially when, for example, things are getting even worse than before (as with the recent actions of President Morsi and the general situation in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen), strict conditions must be applied.
- Offering the various EU instruments on, e.g., handling migratory flows, for the use of the Maghreb and Mashrek partners.
- Pushing for regional integration and cooperation, which, at the moment, hardly exists. To solve the problems, they need to be considered in a regional context.

Member of the European Parliament Isabelle Durant had a somewhat different idea about supporting trade. She emphasized that short-term solutions were needed in the first place, not free trade agreements. She felt that small and medium enterprises' actions are the most significant to be able to tackle the problems of corruption that restrain the political development in the short term.

Commissioner Stefan Füle also listed similar objectives: what does the EU want to offer to the civil society and what does the EU want to strengthen? His answers to these questions were: a legal framework (good conditions for the civil society organisations' (CSOs') actions, freedom of assembly and freedom of expression), the CSOs' ability (to organize themselves, to promote their ideas and to defend themselves, if needed) as well as the ability of the civil society to make their authorities accountable. Commissioner Füle promised stronger EU support through a new instrument, the European Endowment for Democracy, initially to be used in the EU's neighbourhood. He also underlined the importance of conditionality (based on universal values and shared interest) and differentiation (EU instruments not applied to all of our partners in the same way). The Commissioner also introduced a new 'more for more' principle the EU will implement that applies the carrot but not the stick: the more a country invests in sometimes even costly and demanding reforms, the more it gets in return from the EU. Füle's main suggestion came with the proposition to establish a Civil Society Forum with the EU and its Mediterranean partners, to follow the successful example of the EU and its six Eastern partners. According to Füle, the EU could facilitate the dialogue between CSOs themselves and between authorities and CSOs, as well as dialogue at the regional level, and help the CSOs produce a Road Map.

Not only was the EU's "fatherly" role criticized by many North African counterparts but also by some European NGO representatives, who felt the EU has tried to maintain too decisive a role in the civil society incentives it has helped build. Catherine Woollard from the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, called for the Eastern Partnership's Civil Society Forum and its planned southern counterpart to be under civil society control rather than under the European Commission's supervision. When the Commissioner was asked how the civil society's ownership of this forum and projects could be strengthened and the Commission's influence diminished, he did not have a solution. However, he

tossed the ball to the civil society and said: “I have no clue at this time what this platform could look like to be more inclusive. I just feel we should have this platform...Structural dialogue is a reflection of the first stage to facilitate dialogue between civil society and authorities. The EU won't have a role to stay included forever. We don't run the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, the civil society runs it on a democratic basis.”

### **What about Syria?**

Vicente Cassese posed to the EU representatives the question that had most probably lingered in the minds of the majority of the participants at the Marseille Forum: Does the EU have any plan for strengthening the Syrian civil society? A Syrian representative had described the situation as bleak, with no funding or support for the Syrian civil society coming from anywhere, with outside money going to arming one or the other side of the conflict, and with Syria also having lost its seat in the Arab League.

Mr Mingarelli replied by stating that the EU must support those who express their diverging views, and declaring it false that the EU has cut all means of support to the Syrian civil society.

During one of the sessions on the practical projects at the Marseille Forum, the Medinas, Hozan Ibrahim, a Syrian activist based in Germany explained his project for creating a ‘Citizens in Syria platform/network’, whose objective is to change the ideology of support for Syria from sympathy to solidarity. He explained the events after the March 2011 revolution against the dictatorship, but from a Syrian viewpoint. Despite the numerous casualties, destruction of infrastructure and occupied territories, there were still hundreds of activities going on monthly and, to give an example, 161 demonstrations had taken place the previous Friday alone. But these efforts have not been seen in the media. The Syrian people are struggling to rebuild their lives and societies, although the Western media portrays the country as a battle zone. And conversely, outside activities don't make sense to the people inside Syria since they don't even find out about them. This is due to the fact that Syria doesn't have any national Syrian media institution, so the Syrians get their information from Al Jazeera and CNN, just as the Westerners do. Mr. Ibrahim stated as his immediate objectives: connecting youth groups of both sides of the conflict, supporting the revolution, influencing decision-makers and raising awareness. After 40

years of no civil society activity, the country desperately needs advice and experiences. Also, Mr. Ibrahim concluded, the regime is united since it is getting money from Russia and Iran and because the rebels are scattered. What is needed most in Syria is transition justice, reconciliation, and post-revolution experience and support.

### **New opportunities for the youth in society building**

The Euro-Mediterranean youth are very well included and also active, organized and yearning for roles in the construction of their societies. As the youth make up the cornerstone upon which societies are built, it was a pleasure to see how big a role the North African youth were given at the Marseille Forum. Malak Boud, founder of a debating club in Libya, recounted the important role the Libyan youth have played during the revolution. They have organized various events and cared for, among others, the internally displaced people. Now the situation has changed, however, and the youth have been given no role in the construction of the new Libya. The Libyan people have been isolated from the world for 40 years. For Libyans, democracy is a newborn idea, but they are learning about it. Mr. Boud emphasized that the youth and activists are currently working hard to gain a role in the elaboration of the Constitution in an atmosphere of openness. He also said there is a serious lack of communication channels between the youth and the older, more experienced generations – not a conflict gap between the generations.

Fortunately, the situation for the youth is not as bad in the array of Southern Mediterranean countries, and the international community has proclaimed its strong support for the voices of the youth of countries in transition. As an example, the Anna Lindh Foundation's latest aid project is specifically aimed at projects crossing the Mediterranean Sea involving youth or women. And even in the poor, fractured, "small-arms haven" of Yemen, extraordinary developments seem to be underway. According to Thomas L. Friedman of the NY Times, "In its own messy way, Yemen is doing what all the other Arab awakening countries failed to do: have a serious, broad-based national dialogue, where the different political factions, new parties, young people, women, Islamists, tribes, northerners and southerners are literally introducing themselves to one another in six months of talks — before they write a new constitution and hold



presidential elections.’’<sup>28</sup>

### **Coherence for actions concerning women’s rights and representation needed**

Malak Boud spoke also for the restitution of the citizenship role to Libyan women. Before Gaddafi’s rule, the women did have a role to play, but during his rule they could no longer even travel alone. The masculinization of the State should be finally put to an end. Some women representatives from, among others, Morocco, also called (presumably figuratively) for the taking up of arms against the patriarchy. A Lebanese lady stated that Lebanon, although a democracy in principal, has no role in the application of the Constitution for women.

Stavros Lambrindis, the EU’s Special Representative on Human Rights, raised the curtain on international negotiations concerning women’s rights and laid out some important, yet disturbing, facts. At a major New York conference on the status of women in 2012, and at the meeting of the year before, they did not manage to produce any joint conclusions. The topic being violence against women, one would have imagined it to be something all countries would aim at. In 2013, however, traditional values were appealed to and joint conclusions were arrived at. According to Mr. Lambrindis, the biggest obstacle to international cooperation on protecting universal human rights is tradition. Also, religion is often used as an excuse in sidelining human rights. The laws of most governments often imply that women and men are equal, as do most religions, but traditions can contradict them. Mr. Lambrindis spoke strongly for the conditionality of aid in such situations. When some partners say they support human rights but ask the EU to put human rights’ issues aside and first provide for their direst needs, the need to stick to the conditionality becomes even clearer. Mr Lambrindis also spoke of the law on violence against women being developed. In the case of female genital mutilation (FGM), the practice is often forbidden by law, but if the people refrain from getting their daughters circumcised, they are ostracized. Here, he emphasised, lies an important role for civil society since the EU is not the right actor for changing a society or its traditions.

As Sami Hourani, the Jordanian representative of the youth organization ‘Leaders for tomorrow’, stated in his conclusions on the Marseille Forum, the meetings under the

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<sup>28</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/opinion/sunday/friedman-the-yemeni-way.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/12/opinion/sunday/friedman-the-yemeni-way.html?_r=0)

theme ‘women issues’ were quite problematic to wrap up. The fact is, the women representatives at the Forum were quite disorganized and also often strongly contradicting each other. A top priority in the first Medina discussions was rightfully given to actions against female genital mutilation, but rather than trying to build partnerships, as was a main aim of the Forum, the women participants got caught up in heated debates on different viewpoints on what is the correct way to address and overcome this often deep-rooted tradition – without really listening to differing opinions or finding any grounds for mutually benefiting dialogue. Other important issues and problems women are facing, such as human trafficking, particular hardships women refugees face, or the efforts to build women’s political and societal participation received little or no attention.

An Egyptian representative, Adel Ghazely, introduced his project tackling illiteracy and increasing health education for women. He brought up some shocking numbers and stated that 91% of women in Egypt are circumcised and up to 100% of women in Upper Egypt. In addition to that, 40% of women in Upper Egypt are illiterate. Ghazely’s projects included developing four literacy books: a political literacy book for Egyptian women (teaching them to read, write, learn and participate in political life), a reproductive health manual, a political educators’ manual and a reproductive health educators’ manual. What is more, they engaged in community outreach activities and advocacy; utilizing religious language to speak for women’s rights and meeting with community elders to try to influence them to reconsider ways of thinking and traditions that in the worst case have even deadly consequences. What he said was something all the participants seemed to hold in common: “We have to work on the tradition, which takes more time, but it is stronger than law or religion.”

### **Democracy building doesn’t stop with won elections**

A fundamental problem with some of the democratic developments that have arisen in North Africa with the wave of the so-called Arab Spring or the Arab Awakening has been the widely prevailing conception that democracy building somehow comes to an end at elections, and that whoever wins the elections has a democratic mandate for absolute power over the people. Another integral element of democratic representation in a

country - i.e., the necessity for an active opposition acting as counterbalance and watchdog to the ruling party - has yet to take root in some of the new North African democracies. This is the case in Tunisia, for instance, where, according to the acclaimed human rights activist Kamel Jendoubi, the only counterbalance to the absolutistic government could come from the civil society. Mr. Jendoubi warned that there is a risk of the restoration of the old regime and a risk of questioning democracy altogether in the air, and when these are combined with the huge efforts for the stabilization and normalization of the Tunisian economy, the situation will become explosive.

Hugues Mingarelli admitted that there have been various viewpoints expressed on whether or not to support a democratically elected government, which regresses severely with regard to women's rights. He felt that economic support for a transitional country is necessary in any case, but with clear conditions laid out, including human, women's and minority rights. Stavros Lambrindis concurred with Mingarelli and started recounting from a historical perspective: "When the EU used to support the North African dictatorial regimes, they were faced with a dilemma of double standards: how can the Union support hard power values focusing on *realpolitik* when pricing itself on the basis of soft power?" Mr. Lambrindis pinpointed that, in a vibrant democracy, it is the duty of the citizens to observe and judge the governments, and not the other way around. "Citizens need absolute access to the necessary information and an opportunity to socialize and to share information. Democracy is important when people strongly disagree. When a government is not listening to the civil society or when it supervises the civil society's actions, it is undemocratic."

## **Process blockers**

The magnificence of the Barcelona Process, including counterparts from both sides of the Mediterranean Sea engaging in negotiations and common actions on different levels of society, lies in the fact that it offers a unique platform for countries, organizations and institutions with diverse cultural, religious and societal contexts to share (at least on paper) a mutual ambition to bring justice, peace and prosperity to their countries and citizens. There is a seat for Syria at the EuroMed negotiation table, as well as one for Israel and one for the Palestinian Authority, offering an exceptional opportunity to raise

discussions, mediate and, eventually, seek solutions to the protracted Middle East conflict between Israel and Palestine, or the more recently enflamed civil war raging in Syria. It goes without saying that these conflicts have remote and spillover effects in most of the EuroMed member countries, so it should be in everyone's interest to tackle them. However, despite the excellent setting, the progress made in the first, political and security basket of the Barcelona Process has been sadly filibustered by the said conflicts and their effects, among others. Israel has stepped out of the discussions, Syria has previously refused to attend meetings if Israel does and is currently quite unrepresented, and meanwhile, ordinary Syrians are screaming for help to mostly deaf Euro-Mediterranean ears.

There can be no Euro-Mediterranean community without peace. It has been argued that we should wait for a change in the Israeli rule to invite them back to the negotiation table. But the fact is, we need them to discuss problematic issues concerning their country and cannot postpone problem solution to sometime in the future. And we need to acknowledge the dire needs of the Syrian civil society, the Syrian citizens and refugees, as well as the contenders for politics and government. The international community can no longer turn a blind eye to the suffering nation. The resolution of the civil war/conflict - a.k.a. ousting al-Assad and assigning a just and representative rule in his place - is admittedly a historically difficult task, and that is exactly why the aid effort from outside should first be concentrated on supporting and funding the civil society organisations and citizen initiatives that are currently struggling with little outside funding and even less inside resources.

To give an example, as the media coverage of the country is dominated by two outside media conglomerates, CNN and Al Jazeera, the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures that has supported several media projects in the Euromed region could pair up with the European Commission and other donors to help the Syrians build up alternative, local media outlets inside Syria. In the closing session of the Marseille Forum, the key conclusions from the six Agora strategic debate sessions and twenty Agora workshop sessions were presented by Christine Merkel from the National German Commission of UNESCO. Among them she noted that a lot of effort should be invested in developing media literacy and cooperation amongst the citizens of transition

countries, together with the OSCE and others with capacity and experience in the field. The OSCE's media work, including advocacy for the rights of citizens to media and the Internet, and the protection of journalists' physical safety and their integrity in difficult surroundings, has been quite successful. In addition to including a multi-donor approach to ensure broader impact and visibility, the development of the local/national media could allow more objective and multifaceted information to spread both inside Syria between citizens divided from each other by areas of fighting as well as outside its borders. "Not all of Syria is fighting a war," noted a Syrian participant at the Anna Lindh Mediterranean Forum, "Many people are struggling to rebuild the foundations of their homes and communities with no outside help. And all the West sees are images of war." No wonder any outside intervention or support has been deemed a contradiction in terms.

**And it all boils down to questions of States' interests and political will...or the will of the people instead?**

In the closing session of the Marseille Forum, Ms. Merkel drew together some major points that were largely raised during the various sessions. In addition to the integral role of journalists and the media, she underscored the inclusion of women of all ages in all the processes of society, the youth and education, and strengthening possibilities for mobility. "Civil society should play a more organized role in moments of transition to develop mechanisms for a structured dialogue between civil society and government," she pointed out.<sup>29</sup>

In his closing words at the Marseille Forum, André Azoulay, President of the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, wrapped up, in my opinion, the spirit of the Forum: "The potential of the region's abundant youthful energy and dynamism, coupled with its entrepreneurial and innovative spirit, is enormous. We need to address the issues which have undermined previous attempts at building a union for the peoples of the Mediterranean. Top-down solutions will not work. Mediterranean partnership must be for the citizens, from the citizens and to the citizens."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.annalindhforum.org/day-4-closing-forum-role-civil-society-revised>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.annalindhforum.org/key-quotes-forum-personalities-and-institutions>

**For further information:**

[www.annalindhforum.org](http://www.annalindhforum.org)

[www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/euromed/index_en.htm)

[eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/barcelona_en.htm)

[www.euromedalex.org](http://www.euromedalex.org)

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## **ON CULTURAL EXCHANGE – THOUGHTS IN THE WAKE OF THE ANNA LINDH FORUM IN MARSEILLE, 2013**

*Jennifer Dahlbäck*

This was the first time that our organization, The Christine and Göran Schildt foundation, had participated in an international event organized by the Anna Lindh foundation. We wanted to participate in this Forum mainly to get new ideas as well as to find new partners. As it turned out, this was an excellent platform for these purposes. It is not every day you have the possibility to meet people from 43 different countries in the same place. I truly appreciated the atmosphere at the Forum and it was easy to network. Having been an Erasmus exchange student myself in 2001-2002, this event felt somewhat like stepping into that particular sphere again.

Our work is currently in a state of expansion, mainly due to the fact that our personnel have increased (we are now two people working at the foundation instead of one as earlier). This gives us an opportunity to be more active and to search for new partners. We have also started to increase our focus on cultural exchange and we strongly believe that co-operation should be a two-way street. That it really is a question of exchange.

### **Our foundation's agenda**

Our main aim is to strengthen the cultural contacts between Finland and the Mediterranean region. In our work we carry with us Göran Schildt's philosophy of tolerance, openness and respect for all cultures. He stressed that it is important to broaden the mind in an intuitive way without preconceptions. On his travels he plunged into the unknown without judging or asking, just listening, taking in and reacting. Afterwards he processed the information, which resulted in several travel books. These books became a great success and he was soon seen as a visionary for the post-world-war era. With his sailing boat Daphne he sailed to all the corners of the Mediterranean.



Göran Schildt often said that it was the Mediterranean Sea that brought the people along its shores together. That navigation led to a vast network of contacts and established minorities in the different cities. Therefore, every Mediterranean citizen has a cosmopolitan side, a side that was already evident in Odysseus, the archetype of the Mediterranean human.

The foundation's activities are mainly in the field of cultural exchange and we arrange exhibitions and cultural events both in Finland and the Mediterranean region. By cultural exchange I mean both parties trading ideas, customs and beliefs. Our office and gallery is situated in Ekenäs, Finland.

Since 2012 we have had Egypt on our agenda and this summer we are opening an exhibition called *Silver and Sun Eyes. Women's life in the Siwa Oasis*. Through this exhibition we want to put emphasis on the women's sphere as well as present a valuable cultural heritage. The oasis is well known for its silver jewellery and traditional costumes. The Berber culture is still visible in the Siwan handicrafts and textiles and have been well preserved due to the oasis' geographical position. This isolation was broken in the 1980s and little by little the society is becoming more modern.

The Greek island of Leros, where Göran Schildt had his second home, is a strong partner. We have been co-operating with the island since 2010, when we arranged an exhibition about Leros. This generated several other projects and today we co-arrange a sailing event on Leros every autumn. This is not merely a sailing event and cultural programmes are arranged with both Finnish and Greek artists at the same time. This winter we also brought a group of musicians from Leros to Ekenäs. The headlines in the newspapers only talk about the economic crisis in Greece and we wanted to show some positive sides of Greek society.

## **Culture and Creativity at the Forum**

During the Anna Lindh Forum I participated in the sessions arranged in the field of culture and creativity. They consisted of two workshops, one on Arts for change and the other on Cultural Cooperation today: Trends and Needs, as well as one session on Good Practices and another on Project Ideas. It was quite a good setup for me since this was my first time at an ALF international event. However, I got the feeling that people who had

taken part in these discussions before expected more from the sessions. Although the thematic workshops were interesting, I still find that it was the good practices session that gave me the most concrete data. The session for Project Ideas was also a good concept and an excellent place for networking. I also appreciated the possibility to be able to compare our work with what other organizations are doing, and hence get renewed energy and a deeper understanding of the importance of our work. It is refreshing to see your work through the eyes of others.

Overall, I noticed that many of the participants in the culture and creativity sessions were theatres, circuses and festival organizers. For example, the initial speakers in the Good Practices session represented most of these fields: Jamal Youssfi from Belgium (Les Nouveaux Disparus), Marina Barham from Palestine (Al-Harah Center for Theater and Arts) and Florence Chastanier from France (Docs des Sud).

Since we are most focused on cultural exchange, I will now address what was said about co-operation in this field. The important questions were how to build up a well-functioning cultural co-operation, what are the ingredients and is there some way of replicating this? Later on I will relate this to our own projects.

These questions were addressed in some way in every session and although the speakers were active in a different field of culture to us, the points that were stressed are, in my opinion, applicable to every field of culture (and other co-operation).

The most important thing when you are starting up a co-operation is to have a real interest in the project and, consequently, a well-functioning personal chemistry. This is where it all begins and it seems that chance can play a role in how successful a project might become and how eager you are to work for the same outcome.

Face to face contact is essential and you need to get to know your partners, and get to know the country's history, customs and religion too. You should do enough research before starting the project.

The encounter should take place on an equal basis and you should always listen to each other and build up mutual trust. If there is no mutual understanding and no face to face meetings, there can be no real exchange between countries. In order to achieve this, networking is essential and mobility is the keyword.

When you've reached a mutual understanding and have agreed on a plan, you still

have a few challenges to overcome. The biggest challenge is to find funding. In many of the projects presented it seemed that the application processes were taking up too much time and the artistic process itself suffered. But in the most successful co-operations the projects were started without funding and the first steps were taken using their own resources. It was also stated that it is quite hard to have sustainability without proper funding.

Many participants in the Good Practices session were interested in knowing how to replicate a successful project. This is quite a tricky question and the conclusion was that it's better not to try to do so. It is wasted energy and a project is made in the essence of the moment and has to come from a context. Every project is thus unique and replication should not be attempted.

The ingredients I have been repeating here were discussed in the culture and creativity sessions and seem to be rather self-evident, and one can truly understand their significance. Although this specifically concerned co-operation in the field of culture and creativity, you quickly came to understand that these criteria are applicable to all other forms of co-operation between countries.

## **Our experiences**

When you hear about different projects and their success, you immediately start to relate it to your own experiences and the question that arises is: How well are we implementing this in our own projects?

When we start a project we always visit the country with whom we are planning to co-operate. We have so far been welcomed with open arms and the people have arranged a lot of programmes for us. For example, when we visited Leros in 2009, the members of the Artemis culture association drove us around the island in their own cars and invited us into their homes in order for us to experience the real Greek way of life. This built up a mutual trust and when they visited Finland we wanted to do the same for them.

It has sometimes been a hard task for us to present Finland in the most interesting way for them. We have unconsciously been imposing our own ideals and have been blind to our surroundings. For example, when we planned the programme for our Greek visitors, we really wanted to show them the Finnish archipelago and took them out for a

boat tour here in Ekenäs. Of course they enjoyed it, but it did not make as great an impact on them as we had thought. What turned out to be the most interesting thing for them was a walk in the Finnish woods since they have nothing resembling this at home. They were truly amazed by the tall trees and the quiet in the woods. Another thing that really fascinated our Greek visitors in winter has been the fact that you can “walk on the water”. These encounters have taught me a lot and made me see my own homeland in a different light. I am truly grateful to have had the chance to get a glimpse of the world through their eyes.

On Leros we decided that it would be a good idea to bring the dancers and musicians from Artemis to Finland. It is quite hard to have a two-way exchange only through an exhibition. This was largely possible because the association was extremely positive toward this idea and paid for their trips themselves. This project was extremely successful and they performed traditional Greek dances and music during a week in Raseborg. During the time Artemis visited Finland we put them in contact with local teachers, other dancers and music schools, which resulted in many cultural co-productions. This visit also resulted in a three-year-funded Comenius project between the high schools in Ekenäs and Leros. What was planned to be just an exhibition quickly grew into several other projects.

The biggest challenge in our intercultural projects has been communication. When both parties speak a different language as their mother tongue, it is bound to result in misunderstanding. The communication with Leros has thus been a bit easier since Christine Schildt, who is still strongly involved in the foundation's work, lives on Leros for the majority of the year. She speaks Greek fluently and has been an excellent translator.

We have also noticed that direct contacts and regular meetings are essential; you cannot work together through e-mails alone. I have also come to the conclusion that it is important to show some extra consideration and make that extra phone call now and then just to check that everything is going to plan. I find that our Greek partners have been extremely considerate towards us and open to co-operation. They always send their best regards to my little son, even though they have not met him. Still he is always included.

When I have been describing our co-operation with Leros it is clear that most of the

criteria for successful co-operation have been fulfilled here. One thing leads to another, but at the core there is a real interest in co-operation and a desire to get to know each other. In our co-operation it has been easy to meet since both countries belong to the European Union.

## **Last words**

In the discussions in the Culture and Creativity sessions it was agreed that culture should be a right and not merely seen as that “little extra” ingredient in international relations. Cultural contacts are an excellent way to build bridges between countries when the diplomatic or political dialogue isn't functioning.

In the field of culture and creativity there is a genuine interest in co-operation and a will to learn from each other. This was clearly shown through the presentations of all the wonderful projects being already carried out and those in the making.

What I have seen in our own projects, and in other projects presented in the Forum, is that cultural exchange enhances understanding and builds sustainable ties between countries. This should be acknowledged more often and to do so it is important to bring the field together, as in the Anna Lindh Forum.

## **THE INTERFAITH MOVEMENT CREATES A CULTURE IN WHICH LIFE IS RESPECTED**

*Heidi Rautionmaa*

It is my birthday party. Meri-Sofia Lakopoulos has just finished her song from the Greek Orthodox tradition. People are about to have a cup of coffee after enjoying the first of several music presentations and poetry readings from Judaism, the Bahai faith, Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. Before leaving the Uttu chapel, the audience are asked to contribute if they wish to. Shama Dikshit raises her hand and offers to dance a Hindu temple dance. Everyone is thrilled at this so-called Silta (Bridge) event. Shama dances in front of the altar in the Lutheran chapel. It seems that it does not bother anyone. People know this is an interfaith event and everyone has the same equal right to present her or his tradition on the basis of mutual trust and respect.

Dignity is important in the intercultural and interfaith context. People know from history that some religious traditions have taken an exclusive attitude toward how to be in a relationship with others, reflecting such attitudes as if we are right, they are wrong. And most of the participants at these monthly meetings have experienced that throughout the learning process, space is created for exchange, interaction and understanding, as Agneta Ucko describes some elements in the learning process. By promoting understanding, together with critical thinking and an open-minded attitude towards others, this process makes it possible to discover one's own tradition and values, and the values and traditions of others, without being afraid (Ucko 2008). The interaction has both 'giving and receiving' elements.

The participants also know that religions are not merely something of the head, but are also of the spirit, heart and whole being. As one of the ground rules of interfaith dialogue by Leonard Swidler goes: Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religions or ideology 'from within' (Journal of Ecumenical Studies 1984).

The Silta event organized five years ago is a great example of how people have

recognized mutual respect as an indispensable value that should inform all relationships between people. Today, more and more places in world are becoming environments of interculture and interfaith. People need to know not only their own faith but also have an informed understanding of what others believe, and the commonalities we share, both as a human community and in relation to particular challenges. As Leonard Swidler has underlined, the need for dialogue is evident: knowingly to refuse dialogue today could be an act of fundamental human irresponsibility. The search for the truth of the meaning of things makes it a necessity for people to engage in dialogue (Swidler 1999).

### **Walking on the path of action**

These encounters between people from different religions, spiritual traditions and worldviews are accompanied by the interfaith movement that I have actively been involved with since 1999, after attending the Parliament of World's Religions in Cape Town. When The Dalai Lama was asked about the value of the Parliament during the press conference in Cape Town, he responded by pointing out that it was a positive force for sure, but that it needed to walk the path of action (motivated by compassion), not simply words. The same message was heard at the latest UNAOC Forum where, for example, Rabbi Arthur Schneier demanded interfaith action.

The interfaith dialogue movement has for many reasons become increasingly more practical and is also working more and more at the grassroots level. Interfaith dialogue cannot just engage religious specialists if it wants to face human society. The focus has changed from just trying to get people together to discovering what people can and must do together for the common benefit and to make that real.

Paul Knitter argues that in the global crisis of the world, the credibility of religion depends on how far it can contribute to the fight against transcultural structures of inequality and oppression. Knitter sees that a common theological and ethical criterion for all religions is to be found there (Knitter 2001). He and many pioneers of interfaith dialogue think that dialogue can only be effective if it aims not only at understanding but also at working together for the creation of social and political justice.

The interfaith dialogue movement has a long history. Some of its roots go back to 1893, to the first Parliament of World's Religions that took place in Chicago. It has been

said that this gathering created awareness among some that there are “wells of truth” outside their own faith, which, for many participants, means Christianity (Braybrooke 2013).

In the view of Marcus Braybrooke, the interfaith vision is in tune with the character of the emerging post-modern global society. The pluralistic interfaith vision assumes the possibility of those different faiths together affirming certain basic values (Braybrooke 1998).

### **A process of forming an awareness of a world ethic**

One of the most important efforts to invite people from different religions to encounter is the World Ethic project by Hans Küng. A global ethic is the vision of a global transformation of ethical awareness: whether at a worldwide, national or local level, men and women are dependent on shared basic ethical values, criteria and attitudes for peaceful coexistence.

Inspired by the book ‘Global Responsibility’, the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago in 1993 endorsed the Declaration toward a Global Ethic. For the first time in the modern history of religions, representatives of all the world’s religions agreed on the core elements of a shared ethic. The Declaration towards a Global Ethic outlines five universally acceptable principles and values: the principle of humanity; non-violence and respect for life; justice and solidarity; honesty and tolerance; and mutual esteem and partnership (Küng, Kuschel 1993).

There has in fact already been a process of forming an awareness of a world ethic. Several initiatives have come out during the last 20 years that somehow support the process. The Interfaith Dialogue Network in Finland consists of the Helsinki Religious Forum of The United Religions Initiative (URI), the Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network in Finland, Living together in cities (Kaupunki yhteisönä ry.) and Faiths Without Borders (Uskot ilman rajoja ry.), and is also familiar with other declarations, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities, Earth Charter, the United Religions Initiative Charter, Charter of Compassion and Charter of Forgiveness. Those are some initiatives that are working together towards the global ethic.

The main guidance for the dialogue is the Golden Rule. Because the Golden Rule



crosses so many religious traditions and philosophies, it possesses tremendous moral authority and indicates a profound human unity.

### **We must treat others as we wish others to treat us**

The Golden Rule Award is awarded annually by the Interfaith Dialogue Network of Finland and the Netmedia Baabeli. UNESCO Professor Tapio Varis this year joins other prominent recipients of the Golden Rule Award, including President Tarja Halonen, the former Head of State. Due to the activities of this network, Parliament has named Helsinki as one of its Cities of Peace. The Interfaith Dialogue Network in Finland works in fellowship with the Parliament of the World's Religions.

The network will facilitate a Listening Session for the Global Listening Campaign this year. The ambassadors to the Parliament will gather the information coming out from these sessions all over the world and will inform the Council and contribute to shaping the overall theme and significant topics to be addressed at the next Parliament.

No doubt people from different religions, spiritual traditions and worldviews engage in dialogue for a variety of reasons. Michael S.J. Barnes lists few a motivations: For some it tends to make an acceptable form of mission that fits the cultural mood of the age, for some it is one way to answer the demands of justice, to get to know one's neighbours and to develop resources for social cohesion and for some it introduces the challenge of different ways of speaking about reality (Barnes 2012). For some it is also a move towards a deeper understanding of the Transcendent, which means that people come together not only at the level of discussion or common action but also of prayer and meditation.

### **Peace prayer events invite participants to introduce spirituality of different traditions**

There were people from the Lutheran Church, the Catholic Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Bahai faith, Islam, Buddhism and Gnostic Mandaeanism standing around the Peace pole at the Book Fair in Turku in 2001. After a moment of silence, each person prayed their peace prayers. The pole symbolizes the oneness of humanity and our common wish for a world at peace. It reminds us to think, speak and act in a spirit of

peace and harmony. It also stands as a silent visual for peace to prevail on earth.

This was the first interfaith peace prayer event the Finnish URI group had the joy to coordinate spontaneously in Turku, and since then there have been interfaith prayer events in front of the Cathedrals in Turku and Helsinki, in the Chapel of the Holy Spirit, at World Village Festivals and at Loviisa Peace Forums, and there has been also an interfaith ceremony (including five world religions) that had elements of prayer and meditation. The interfaith ceremony was held at The Turku Fair and Congress Center with about 700 participants in 2007. These events invite participants to introduce their spirituality. For example, the interfaith ceremony began with a Jewish woman, Ruth Hasan, blessing bread and sharing the bread with people from other religions.

Quite often, peace and sacred music has accompanied these interfaith events. There have been celebrations with panel discussions and performances of music, dance and poetry at the Cultural Center of Caisa for several years and most recently also at the media library in Myllypuro in cooperation with Netmagazine Baabeli. The Forum of Religions in Helsinki, URI CC, has celebrated the UN Peace Day since 2003 with presentations from various religions and cultures. Before the UN Interfaith Harmony Week was launched, the Forum of Religions in Helsinki celebrated the Week of Global Interfaith Dialogue that was the idea of Dharma Master Hsin Tao.

URI is the largest global grassroots interfaith network that has ECOSOC status with the United Nations. The idea for URI came to California Episcopal Bishop William Swing in 1993 after an invitation by the United Nations to host a large interfaith service in San Francisco to mark the 50th anniversary of the signing of the UN Charter. He asked himself “If the nations of the world are working together for peace through the UN, then where are the world’s religions?” In partnership with Professor David Cooperrider from Social Innovations in Global Management at Case Western University and Dee Hock, developer of VISA and the Chaordic Alliance, Swing launched a four-year organizational design process that included meetings among hundreds of stakeholders in diverse religions, cultures and disciplines all over the world. The global URI organization was born on 26 June 2000. The first URI cooperation circle in Finland and the Nordic countries, called The Forum of Religions in Turku (Turun Uskontojen Foorumi), was created in the same year.

## **Understanding through shared sitting**

Shared moments in silence have always been a part of the programme of being together. The dialogue has included efforts to appreciate each others' patterns of prayer and meditation. As Wayne Teasdale has said: Often practitioners achieve greater mutual understanding through a shared sitting than from endless hours of conversation, no matter how rich and meaningful (Teasdale 1999). It has been the most exciting level of encounter for me as well.

According to Sulak Sivaraksa, mediation practice cultivates the development of equanimity. The one who has equanimity is fully aware of what is going on without being blinded by attachment. This allows the development of wisdom that allows us to help others with compassion and understanding (Sivaraksa 2005). Important breakthroughs that can carry into other areas of mutual discovery can also occur in stillness.

People have become friends through the dialogue activities. For example, the members of the Forum of Religions in Helsinki have participated in each other's parties, such as baptism and confirmation celebrations. They have also been sailing and on picnics together, and have made a visit to Stockholm and Uppsala to meet people that are also active in interfaith dialogue and cooperation.

## **Social engagement builds a peace-loving culture**

The dimensions of the traditional work of Head (mind, inspiration, thoughts, communications), Heart (emotion, compassion) and Hands (action-oriented endeavours) are all needed in the dialogue process.

The participants meet around a common social interest and discover further commonalities while building more trust and mutual respect.

The social engagement not only brings people together through concrete projects of mutual concern and benefit but also builds a non-violent, peace-loving culture that includes everyone equally, but this only happens if all are respected and treated equally. This concrete working dimension also helps people to liberate themselves from the tendency to formality and hierarchical communication. Religious cultures can have too formal elements that often, unfortunately, have hardly any relevance to a living spiritual

practice.

One practical example of a social engagement activity is the choir visits to the senior centres that Marko Näätänen, a Hindu member of the Forum of Religions in Helsinki, has organized in order to meet elderly people. The members of the Interfaith Dialogue Network in Finland have also made school visits and organized Golden Rule events for students at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences and some high schools.

### **Being active at different forums**

The actors in the Interfaith Dialogue Network in Finland are locally active and globally connected. There have been several programmes on the stage of the World Village festival during the past ten years with themes such as peace and religions, the contribution of women of faith in peace building, celebration of the Golden Rule and how interfaith dialogue can promote democracy. The members of the Interfaith Dialogue Network in Finland have also taken part in the Social Forum in Finland for many years. Faiths Without Borders and Living together in cities have invited a few guests from abroad to speak at the Social Forum about issues concerning global interfaith dialogue and cooperation. Living together in cities coordinated the Social Forum events related to the themes of peace and dialogue for a couple years.

In September 2011, Faiths Without Borders, Uskot ilman rajoja ry., began its exploration of the elements with the Holy Drop! project, an examination of water as a substance not only necessary for life but sacred to many systems of belief. In June 2012, members of this NGO brought together members of many religions, spiritual beliefs and indigenous traditions to discuss that relationship – and provide their own blessings over water – during a ceremony at Rio+20, the United Nations Conference for Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro. Dr. Reijo E. Heinonen, who led the Faiths Without Borders presentation, says that spirituality, with its holistic, religious dimensions, can promote the understanding of the intrinsic value of water – which can hinder its prodigal use. Faiths Without Borders also attended the 64<sup>th</sup> Annual United Nations Conference for Non-Governmental Organizations associated with the Department of Public Information, on the theme of Sustainable Societies; Responsive Citizens, in Bonn in 2011.

## **Religions for Peace empowers religious communities to improve lives**

Religions for Peace (RfP), founded in 1970, is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world's great religions dedicated to promoting peace, working in cooperation with the UN system. RfP creates multi-religious partnerships that mobilize the moral and social resources of religious people to address their shared problems. Respecting religious differences while celebrating our common humanity, RfP is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled areas of the world, creating multi-religious partnerships to confront our most dire issues: stopping war, ending poverty and protecting the earth.

Religions for Peace brings hundreds of key religious leaders together every five years to discuss the great issues of our time. In November 2013, the Ninth World Assembly will take place in Vienna, which the Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network in Finland will attend. RfP Women in Finland, launched in 2008, is part of the Religions for Peace European Women of Faith Network (EWFN) and is the first, and so far the only, RfP Women of Faith Network in the Nordic countries.

EWFN has a unique exhibition called The Dignity of Women – Scriptural reflections. This exhibition relates verses from the different religious scriptures regarding the status and honour of women. One of the aims is to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. RfP Women in Finland has organized a march against poverty and has participated in the Restoring Dignity – End violence against women campaign in cooperation with the European network. The RfP Women of Faith Network in Finland has meetings in religious places in order to meet women in those religious communities that host the meetings. This is one way to widen the dialogue and raise awareness.

EWFN runs the Sacred Water Campaign that Women in Finland and also Faiths Without Borders are cooperating with. The three main areas of the campaign are to make young people aware of the value of water, to promote sustainable development and to advocate water as a basic human right.

The activities mentioned above are examples of how interfaith activities are not just intended to increase awareness of the need for interfaith cooperation and encourage those involved to assess their progress but also to increase mutual respect within the community and take joint responsibility and care for each other as human beings and

citizens, both locally and globally.

### **Continuing interfaith dialogue matters**

The dialogue has been a continuous dialogue, so people have had the possibility to share their insights and have had better chances to get to know each other in deep dialogue. Dialogue on the grassroots level, where a person represents her/his own personal faith, often challenges the person to see what is relevant in her/his religion or ideology instead of letting the religion or spiritual tradition continue to be clouded by the cultural contexts. In my experience, it seems that such encounters and cooperation lead a person to highlight the ethics instead of the doctrine.

The dialogue discussions give opportunities to define the rights and responsibilities of the religions and their members, and how they relate to violations and promotions and implementations of human rights. As Leonard Swidler sees it, the primary purpose of dialogue is to learn - that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality - and then to act accordingly: Most importantly, participants in dialogue will be energized not only for themselves but also to inspire others (Swidler 1999).

### **Interfaith learning is not a luxury**

The learning process allows the participants to reflect on different cultures, faith traditions, ideas and ways of thinking. It has also been developed to help the participants open up to others, nurture their inner selves, and better respond to the needs of their immediate environment.

Michael S. J. Barnes also takes the theme of learning as central to the responsible practice of interfaith dialogue. He sees that the one thing all forms of dialogue share is experience of learning. According to Barnes, the dialogue and learning are imperatives, not luxuries. Interfaith learning is more than a valuable resource for promoting social cohesion in a pluralist society. For him, as a Christian, it is essential for the proper articulation of the Christian faith. It is a reflection of living in an ever-developing relationship with people of faith (Barnes 2012). An inter-religious relationship and approach to religious life has thus become an integral part of being a religious person.

Dialogue is central to any learning process, especially an interfaith learning process. Dialogue gives an opportunity to exchange ideas, share experiences and discover others, and gives the participants an opportunity to challenge their own perceptions.

### **Listening creates the potential for positive change**

It is important to find concrete ways with which to accomplish interfaith dialogue competences. It requires us to bring our own best thoughts on how some new methods and approaches might be introduced or might enrich the current practice in fresh new ways. It is also necessary to see which interfaith dialogue competences must be strengthened. This is what I am now working on in my studies and the curriculum work for the international Women and Youth Interfaith Leadership training.

It has been noticed through the URI work that creating shared positive views of a future that people of faith would like to build together creates opportunities for positive change. It opens the door to sustained interaction. The URI has developed an innovative and positive approach to promoting interfaith dialogue through its unique partnership with Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which has also been used in Finland. It is a positive-change methodology that involves a system's stakeholders in moving through a four-phased process of Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery (or Destiny) (4-D Cycle). AI is founded on the belief that any organization grows in the direction of the questions it asks and that the most effective questions are those that elicit visions of a shared positive future, as well as the best practices of the past that can help create that future. Creating shared positive views of a future that people of faith would like to build together creates opportunities for positive change. It opens the door to sustained interaction.

Appreciative Inquiry carries a belief that the gathered community contains sufficient wisdom, without the need for privileged "expert" voices, to create a vision and the plan and commitments necessary to realize that vision. AI cultivates a practice of sacred listening based on a belief that every voice matters (Sampson, Abu-Nimer, Liebler, Whitney 2003)

## **Listening calls for practice**

One of the most important things in dialogue is to listen authentically to one another about the experiences and learnings of deep, positive matters of personal importance. Listening and being listened to creates the potential for positive change, especially between and for those that have previously met each other mainly with negative stereotypes.

Kay Lindahl thinks that listening is a creative force. Something quite wonderful occurs when we are listened to fully. We expand, ideas come to life and grow, we remember who we are. Some speak of this force as a creative fountain within us that springs forth, others call it the inner spirit, intelligence, true self. Whatever this force is called, it shrivels up when we are not listened to and thrives when we are. Listening is an art that calls for practice (Lindahl 2004). The best way to practice is to start encountering; be like Shama Diskhit at this Silta event. She enjoyed the art presentations and also wanted to share her own dance.

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## **UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS – TOWARDS A DEEPENING DIALOGUE?**

*Ilari Rantakari*

### **Where are we?**

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC; [www.unaoc.org](http://www.unaoc.org) ) was established by the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2005 as the result of a process that started in the aftermath of 9/11 in 2001. The bombings in Europe prompted Spain and Turkey to actively support the idea of promoting the much needed dialogue between cultures and religions to prevent further polarization and violence.

Kofi Annan appointed a High Level Group to prepare a proposal for the Alliance's objectives, main focus areas and organizational structure of the initiative. The Group Report was submitted in November 2006. Until today, the content of the report has been considered the Alliance's mandate and basis for the overall development of the Alliance's actions, as well as for the organizational structure.

The Alliance is an interesting and exceptional mechanism – which is neither a UN Organization nor a UN Fund. It is a flexible structure under the UNSG headed by the High Representative and assisted by the Secretariat led by its Director. The first High Representative, the former President of Portugal, Jorge Sampaio, was appointed by Kofi Annan in 2007 and he served until February 2013. The first Director of the Secretariat, Marc Scheuer, also retired in February 2013.

The UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon appointed the new High Representative Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al Nasser from Qatar to take over from President Sampaio and also the new Director Matthew Hodes to take over from Marc Scheuer.

According to the High Level Group, the overarching objective of the Alliance is to promote dialogue between the so-called Islamic world and the so-called West. The Group defined the main focus areas as youth, media, migration and education.

The Alliance members – over 130 – consist of so-called Friends that have joined the

Alliance as governments or international organizations. The Alliance is also bringing other stakeholders, such as civil society, private sector, academia, media and religious background representatives, into the Alliance's meetings and involving them in the Alliance's actions.

The work of the Alliance is financed entirely through voluntary contributions. As the resources, including the modest number of Secretariat staff, are limited, the Alliance has to rely on the independent work of its members and partners in order to achieve the Alliance's dialogue objectives.

The Alliance holds an Annual Forum – the 5<sup>th</sup> Forum took place in Vienna in February 2013. Ministerial meetings are arranged during the Annual Forum as well as during the UN General Assembly Ministerial week in September.

The Alliance has so far adopted two regional strategies and action plans – namely the South East Europe and the Mediterranean ones. The Latin American Strategy is being finalized during 2013. Some others are under initial discussion.

The latest addition to the organizational structure is the Partners' Assembly, which was convened for the first time in Istanbul in May 2012. The main purpose is to bring all interested parties and partners together to provide the necessary funding and to present their other commitments in the implementation of the Alliance's objectives.

Every country or international organization that is a Friend is expected to appoint an Alliance Focal Point to act as the coordinator and facilitator to promote the Alliance's actions in each country or organization.

The Vienna 2013 Forum can be considered a milestone as the Alliance has spent 5-6 years going through an active formation and capacity building phase under the leadership of the former High Representative Jorge Sampaio.

The new High Representative, together with the Secretariat, Friends and Partners, has a challenging task to assess what has been achieved and what kind of steps are required in consolidating and further developing the special and added value of the noble work of the Alliance in the coming years.

## **How to move forward?**

After these 5-6 formative years it would be appropriate to really take stock of what the

current Alliance activities are and what has been achieved with the wide spectrum of actions globally, regionally and locally. This stock taking and assessment could also look into the Alliance's mandate – that is into the High Level Group Report. I am not at this stage suggesting a fully-fledged evaluation but rather a look into the possible changes in the overall international environment and perhaps into the need to reassess the priorities and how these could be effectively implemented at various levels.

Perhaps even open systematic feedback from the available High Level Group members as well as from Friends and Partners could serve the purpose. At least the Focal Point members could share their experiences, possible visions and concrete proposals.

The need for furthering dialogue between the Islamic World and the West is obvious - and required more than ever. The Western actors and the OIC could enhance and strengthen their contacts and dialogue as one step forward.

I believe most of us consider the current Alliance focus areas to be the most relevant. The challenge is that the actions are planned and implemented in close collaboration with other relevant actors – whether other UN Bodies, regional entities, other partners or even bilateral, plurilateral and civil society operators.

Avoidance of overlapping and unnecessary competition would require some kind of systematic mapping before new Alliance openings and actions are introduced.

There seems to be quite a lot of support for the idea that the Alliance should not endeavour to become another Development Agency but should concentrate on innovative approaches and actions in its core areas. The lack of sustainable funding and resourcing makes it even more critical to define the comparative advantages and building of excellence for the Alliance.

The division of labour and necessary cooperation with other actors would suggest further discussion with - as examples - UNESCO, the European Union, the European Council, the Anna Lindh Foundation, etc. The Alliance has adopted a Mediterranean Strategy and Action Plan. The Action Plan has been minimally implemented so far due to a lack of funding and committed resource-providing partners. On the other hand, the Anna Lindh Foundation has a number of years' working experience in similar areas in the region. UNESCO, the EU, the European Council and many other multilateral and bilateral, as well as civil society organizations are actively involved in North Africa and

the Middle East and could act as partners in the desired actions. The previously mentioned mapping, collaboration and making use of the synergies and joint actions could further improve the achievement of the Alliance's objectives in the region

The same also applies to the implementation of the South East Europe Strategy and Action Plan.

As already referred to earlier in this article, the Alliance Focal Points have gathered experience and visions in the actual implementation of the Alliance's objectives. Most of them are officials in the Foreign Ministries but some are in other ministries or relevant institutions. Anyhow, their knowledge, experience and views could be more systematically made use of when planning, commenting on and implementing the Alliance's actions.

### **The Nordic Region and the Alliance**

All of the Nordic countries are Friends of the Alliance and actively support its objectives – not only politically and practically at home but also through their overall international activities. The dialogue issues are also an important component of their development cooperation programmes and projects with their partner countries and regions.

So far, only Denmark has prepared a separate national plan as recommended by the Alliance. Other Nordic countries have indicated that they have either approved government programmes on all Alliance focus areas (youth, media (literacy), migration, education) or have not felt the need to prepare a separate national plan.

On the other hand, there has been discussion and, currently, a concrete initiative and plan to ask the Nordic Council to join the Alliance as a sub-regional Friend with the purpose of contributing to the effective implementation of the Alliance's objectives in the Nordic countries. The initiative of parliamentarians from all Nordic countries was endorsed and unanimously recommended by the relevant Council Committee in April 2013. The Nordic Council is expected to decide on the matter in its full session in October 2013.

The High Representative Ambassador Al Nasser is expected to visit Finland in early September. The tentative plan includes a brainstorming seminar where at least all Nordic Focal Points, Nordic ALF national network coordinators and some other Nordic

stakeholder representatives will have an opportunity to discuss the current and future plans of the Alliance and the Nordic collaboration with him and his team.

## **Finland and the Alliance**

Finland has strongly supported the establishment of the Alliance from the very beginning and joined as a Friend in 2006. Our (since 2012) former President Ms Tarja Halonen, as President of the Republic, participated in the Alliance Forums in Madrid and Istanbul. She also led Finland's delegation at the Vienna Forum in February 2013. Our Foreign Minister or another Minister has participated in most Alliance Ministerial Meetings.

Finland has also financially supported the Alliance from the development cooperation funds – and specifically its youth activities through the Youth Solidarity Fund. The overall target is to support the work of the youth organizations, particularly in North Africa and the Middle East.

In October 2010, The UN General Assembly unanimously – based on the Jordanian initiative and supported by the Alliance – adopted a resolution about the World Inter-Faith Harmony Week to be celebrated annually during the first week of February. A collaboration mechanism of different religious and other stakeholders has been developed in Finland to plan and implement the various activities during the week as well as throughout the year.

As the Muslim population has grown over the past few decades, and particularly over the last few years, it has been only natural and appropriate to look into the needs and integration issues more systematically. Most members are either first or second-generation migrants. Therefore, many religious and other Muslim organizations have only recently been founded. Many Muslims have felt that the issue of competent Imams as the leaders of the religious institutions is of great importance in Finland. In this publication there is a separate article about an interesting Imam training study that is partly supported by the Anna Lindh Foundation.

The activities of Finland's Focal Point include the aspiration to keep the relevant actors in Finland informed as an important element and to seek feedback, comments and recommendations for the Alliance from them. Another important element is to facilitate necessary contacts and actions – like the above-mentioned celebration of the World Inter-

Faith Harmony Week and the study on the Imam training needs in Finland.

There is an Alliance Network of different government and municipal authorities that also meets as and when required. It is worth mentioning that the City of Helsinki had the main responsibility for holding the workshop on Multicultural and Migrant Education in the Schools at the Vienna Forum.

The other Alliance Network consists of all interested stakeholder groups, including various civil society groups, the private sector, parliamentarians, youth organizations, media representatives, migrant organizations, religious actors, etc. The purpose is to provide a possibility to discuss the Forum and other Alliance meetings' agendas and provide experiences and discuss the follow-up activities and participation plans.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the High Representative is expected to visit Finland in early September 2013. In that context, the tentative plan is to ensure that all stakeholder groups have an opportunity to meet him and his team and discuss how best to advance the Alliance's objectives in our circumstances.

As the Alliance Forum and the Anna Lindh Forum were both held during early 2013, it was decided to bring both the Alliance and Anna Lindh Foundation networks together in May 2013 for a briefing on the outcome of both Forums.

## **EXPERIENCES OF UNAOC NETWORK CO-OPERATION FROM AN EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW**

***Päivi Käre-Zein***

As an international business teacher at Haaga-Helia, a large, multicultural university of applied science ([www.haaga-helia.fi](http://www.haaga-helia.fi)), I have experienced multiculturalism as a “normal” way of life for almost 20 years. Out of our more than 10,500 students, 1,000 are international degree students representing 100 different nationalities. We also have more than 350 exchange students every year.

In a business school there is a need to understand that business has been conducted between enemies throughout history, and that business is separate from politics and religion. Business unites buyers and sellers globally. We build trust between diverse groups, from East and West, North and South, and trust is also very important in business life. At school, dialogue works through teamwork building, working in multicultural groups, contact sessions and PBL (Problem-based learning method) as we aim to prepare our students for a better global and multicultural world.

When I was a student in the mid-1980s, I remember we had an enquiry about a student’s religious background and spiritual/religious life and values. Today, religion has somehow been put aside and does not play any practical role in the educational world at the higher level.

Religion has been placed with cultural understanding, cultural diversity or cross-cultural management courses, which also stress the meaning of ethics and sustainable development. I would argue that direct talk about religious background is as taboo in business education as it is in business talks.

Actually, this might be a better direction for strengthening multiculturalism as religions and the name of religions wake up so much sensitivity. During term time, the dialogue between students is very natural. In a neutral country like Finland we do not take sides in the global religious sensitivity – which our students actually know very little of.



Religion and politics play such a big role in today's global environment that the universities are one of the few "religion/politics-free" places. Our pedagogical methods like problem-based learning, storytelling and round table discussions give a strong ground for neutral meetings between "equal" people. Equality is a strong value in Finland, and these methods fit our education system very well.

However, religion and politics are important to many people outside of the university and working life. Dialogue between different international students is vital for reconciliation and boosting the co-operation between partners. It also leads to true dialogue between civilizations. Due to our neutral nature, Finland is a great place in which to practice this equal confrontation between people. For example, many of my Moslem and Jewish students have said that this is the very first place where they have actually talked with each other!

The Alliance of Civilizations' (UNAOC) goal is to improve understanding and cooperative relationships among nations and peoples across cultures and religions. It is also helping to counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism. It was established in 2005 on the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. The universities have very similar goals!

I have participated in the UNAOC network as a representative of Haaga-Helia by joining in the conferences in Turkey in 2009 and Qatar in 2011. We have also arranged nationwide actions to support the goals. As a result, we have arranged several high level seminars on related themes with lecturers from abroad, namely Mr. Mussie Hailu from Ethiopia and Ms. Lily Swabe from America, together with many Finnish experts in the field.

Since the Alliance works to support its projects in four programme areas, Haaga-Helia has tried to follow these areas. In 2012 we arranged a seminar that focused on Intercultural Dialogue and Diversity, with a special focus on the media. This year, 2013, during the World Interfaith Harmony Week, our leading question was "How does religion influence business, or does it influence at all?"

### **Training, sports management and vocational teacher education.**

Haaga-Helia helped to initiate the exportation of high-quality education abroad, and has

especially succeeded in Saudi-Arabia. The Saudis are strongly developing their education sector, and they have chosen Finland to be their example country. This decision has greatly facilitated our export initials.

The “World Interfaith Harmony Week” stresses that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of sustainable peace within and among societies, and proclaims the first week in February of every year as the World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs.

One idea at Haaga-Helia has been to launch a national idea and campaign to create a grassroots movement of people who advocate for diversity in the field of education. We have very lively societies and our environment is very active. We should not hold back on our dialogue.

The campaign calls on every polytechnic or university to undertake one action that promotes diversity - that is, to arrange something during the harmony week in the future.

As with many years before, Haaga-Helia will celebrate the harmony week again next year. A good goal would be: “A Harmony Week for All Polytechnics and Universities in Finland in the year 2014”. Join us in celebrating the Harmony Week and Cultural Diversity Dialogue!



# **DO WE NEED IMAM TRAINING IN FINLAND? INTERFAITH AND OTHER ENCOUNTERS BETWEEN NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS: EXCHANGING VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES ON TRAINING IMAMS – AND FEMALE GUIDES FOR ISLAM**

*Riitta Latvio*

FOKUS, the Forum for Culture and Religion, is currently coordinating “Do we need imam Training in Finland?”, a Common Project Action of the Finnish ALF network to assess the demand for education among imams working in Finland<sup>31</sup>. The project comprises a questionnaire and interviews among Finnish Muslim societies, and, to provide background to the study, a survey of the existing models and practices for imam training in some Muslim and European countries. A follow-up project to study the possibilities of providing training for female guides along with imams is being planned. This article describes these processes and the role of FOKUS as a facilitator of the projects, as well as the international and national communications and encounters we have engaged in on the way.

## **FOKUS as a civil society organisation**

FOKUS is an ecumenical civil society organisation that supports and promotes peaceful dialogue between religions and cultures by providing information and creating open forums for ecumenical and interfaith encounters via discussions, exhibitions, art and publications<sup>32</sup>. It has pursued contacts and co-operation with international organisations such as Religions for Peace, the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) and the Anna Lindh

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<sup>31</sup> The Finnish ALF network partners in the project are: TAPRI, Tampere Peace Research Institute; Åbo Akademi University, Dept of Comparative Religion; Helsinki Process on Globalisation and Democracy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland; Institutum Judaicum Aboense; Loviisa Peace Forum; Monika – Multicultural Women's Association; Suomen Muslimiliitto (Finnish Muslim Union); Islamic Council of Finland (SINE); UN Association of Finland, Individual member, Anja Toivola-Stambouli.

<sup>32</sup> The GLOBAL ETHIC exhibition and teacher's material prepared in collaboration with The German Global Ethic Foundation in 2009-2010 has been touring schools, congregations, ngos and festivals during the past few years, and in 2010 FOKUS edited and published a toolkit on INTERFAITH DIALOGUE for educators, to mention a few examples.

Foundation network. For its part, FOKUS furthers the overall objectives of the UN Alliance of Civilisations, both nationally and internationally, by, among other things, co-ordinating the planning and communication of Finnish events for the globally celebrated UN Interfaith Harmony Week. FOKUS is also pursuing the foundation of a national Finnish chapter within the global Religions for Peace organisation.

Every other year FOKUS organizes a Culture Forum as a meeting point for people and ideas, and an opportunity for discussion on where the society is now and should be heading as regards religion, arts and politics. In 2008 the topic was *Identity*, in 2010 *Migration*, and in 2012 *Virgin Mary in Christianity and other Religions*. In 2006, a Culture Forum was convened under the title “*Religions and Cultures – from Confrontation to Genuine Dialogue*” that focused on dialogue between Islam and Christianity in particular. The participants, speakers and discussants at the Forum included scientists, civil society activists, and politicians from Finland and other EuroMed countries. The openings and presentations at the 2006 Forum were published in the book “*At the Center of the Sacred*”, which presented contributions to discussions on global education, integration of immigrants or civil society organizations fighting prejudice and working for equality from a religious vantage point.

## **Muslims in Finland**

The number of Muslims in Finland is currently estimated at around 60,000 – and rapidly growing. There are about 40 registered Muslim communities and an undefined number of - often self-taught - imams working with various multilanguage groups. Although there are several ongoing training schemes in the EU area, there is, as yet, no supplementary or basic vocational training for imams in Finland.

The Finnish Muslims have, in several contexts, noted the pressing demand for trained imams and other spiritual workers who are familiar with the Finnish circumstances and legislation. The training of teachers of Islam for Finnish schools began in 2007 at the University of Helsinki, and the Finnish Muslims have shown interest in participating in the training. There is also a growing interest in interfaith dialogue and co-operation between different religions.

## **Background**

The project was put in motion in two seminars organised in Helsinki during the UN's global World Interfaith Harmony Week in the Februaries of 2011 and 2012, which discussed Finland as a challenge for Muslims as well as *vice versa*, and the role and education of imams in both the European and Finnish contexts. At the latter 2012 seminar, the need for a comprehensive survey among the Finnish Muslim community was acknowledged since no information had thus far been gathered on the educational background of Finnish imams, nor of their demand for supplementary training.

After consultations with different actors it was resolved that FOKUS would undertake the organisation of the study in co-operation with the Finnish Muslim Union and Visioforum. The project received funding from the Anna Lindh Foundation, and has been underway since May 2012, to be completed in the summer of 2013. The study itself is being conducted by the present writer and supervised by a steering group chaired by Ambassador Ilari Rantakari (Chairman of FOKUS & Finland's UNAOC Focal Point), with representatives from Muslim associations (Mr Abdessalam Jardi, Finnish Muslim Union, and Mrs Pia Jardi, Visioforum and SINE) two imams (from Tariq al Hidayah, Imam Walid Hammoud and from the Tatar Community: Finlandiya Islam Cemaati, Imam Ramil Bilal Belyaev), experts on both academic Islamic studies and higher education in Finland (Professor Tuula Sakaranaho from the University of Helsinki and Mr Pekka Iivonen from the Finnish Board of Education) and the Executive Director of FOKUS, Mrs Satu Mustonen.

## **Goals**

The goals of the current project are:

- to gather and disseminate information about the role of imam in a Muslim community, about achieving that position in their respective communities of faith, the tasks of an imam towards other members of the faith as well as towards society at large, and the educational background of those people who act as imams in present day Finland

- to initiate discussion (and hopefully political will) for improving the communication resources and dialogue skills of those working as imams, as well as their competence in answering to the needs of their community of faith.

The results of the survey will be widely communicated, the main target groups being the public sector and third sector actors, and faith-based organisations – interfaith dialogue actors in particular, but also the Muslim population at large and the public in general.

### **The role of imams in Muslim communities and the quest for education**

The first stage of the project comprised a questionnaire sent to the imams of the Muslim organizations – with questions on their tasks, current training and labour market situation - and interviews with the chairmen of these organizations. The purpose was to obtain their views on the current situation and about arranging imam training in Finland – whether basic or supplementary. The study was carried out among those Muslim societies that have either registered as religious communities in Finland or are large enough to have a mosque or prayer house in use, approximately 50 to 60 communities in all.

In the autumn of 2012 a discussion seminar was organised for imams and chairpersons of the Muslim associations to inform them of the enquiry and its tasks, and discuss the present situation in the Muslim communities as regards their leaders and spiritual workers in general, including the role of imam in Finland. In interviews with both imams and chairs of the Muslim organisations, the current conventions of recruiting and educating imams were further surveyed, as well as their notions about the role and tasks of imams in Finnish Muslim communities and views on the kind of education that would best cater for the needs of their communities.

### **Models for imam training: experiences from other European and predominantly Muslim countries**

In addition to this, the project has also surveyed imam training programmes already in use in Europe and gathered experiences from the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Sweden and

Great Britain.<sup>33</sup> The networking with European experts included participation in an international evaluation seminar of the Dutch imam training programme at the Inholland University in Amsterdam, as well as direct contact with universities that provide imam training and scholars who have worked on the topic.

Imam training discussion in Europe has revolved around integration, the legal confines set on the status of religious minority communities and, especially, the recent fear of radicalised Islam. The policies chosen in the Nordic countries place emphasis on the principle of equality between different religious communities: Norway has just one multifaith training programme suitable for all religious leaders while Sweden chose not to provide imam training so as not appear partial.

As a conclusion of this part of the project, one might present the view that European imam training – whether organised by the private or public sector, by the Muslim community itself or as part of the national system of education – faces challenges of credibility and legitimacy, either among the Muslim community or the authorities or both. Suffering from a lack of career opportunities for the students, the training programmes also face issues of sustainability. Countries with old or strong Muslim minorities usually have in-community training, but that is usually organised by some ethnic or political group, or religious sect, and as such is not approved of by all of the Muslim community. Consequently, many Muslim scholars still choose to be educated in Muslim majority countries and many societies continue to recruit their imams from those countries. An important exception to this rule is Great Britain, which predominantly educates its imams in domestic institutions.

Requests for co-operation with education providers were sent to the embassies of five countries to gather information about imam training in Islamic or Muslim majority countries, but these leads have not yet been thoroughly followed through. These models will also be reported in the project report to be published in the summer of 2013<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup>These countries were chosen as examples of different approaches to providing the training in question: 1) State-organised multifaith training for religious leaders (Norway), 2) State-organised non-theological supplementary training for imams (Sweden and Germany), 3) State-organised vocational and theological imam training (Netherlands) and 4) private imam training in Islamic seminars with accreditation in universities (England).

<sup>34</sup> For details of the forthcoming final report, see the FOKUS website: [www.kulttuurifoorumi.fi](http://www.kulttuurifoorumi.fi).



## **Survey results: recruitment and educational background of Finnish imams<sup>35</sup>**

Most Finnish communities have used and still do use self-taught imams and call on trained imams from Muslim countries to teach, consult and conduct ceremonies especially during Ramadan. Imams working and resident in Finland have usually attended courses in the Finnish mosques, but at least half of the Finnish imams who answered the questionnaire do not have a coherent religious training. However, as the interviewees made clear, education and knowledge of Islamic sciences alone are not sufficient criteria for being elected an imam in one's community; one's personality, views and conduct also matter, and suitability most often meant moderate views, strong morals and devotion to Islam<sup>36</sup>. As regards the law, the chairs of the Finnish Muslim societies commonly held that where the Islamic and Finnish law clashed, imams should teach their members of faith to live according to the Finnish law.<sup>37</sup>

Most Finnish imams have lived here for more than 10 years. Only one gets paid for being an imam, the rest work unpaid, irregular hours, and some only a couple of hours, but most more than 20 hours per week. Nearly all have another occupation to live by or are full-time students. The majority thought they would avail themselves of supplementary training for an imam in their work. The most popular topics were academic Islamic Studies and Finnish law, Finnish history and society, family consulting and leadership training. Only two imams expressed doubts about the possible Finnish imam training, the rest liked the idea. Nearly all asked for courses to be organised by a third level education provider. All the chairs thought they could participate in the development of a Finnish supplementary training programme, but, at the same time, the majority still held that the so-called Islamic sciences should be acquired abroad. It was suggested that the concern for the legitimacy of the training in the eyes of future generations could be solved by using imported scholars,

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<sup>35</sup>20 chairmen from 17 different Muslim communities in Finland resolved to participate in the study, and some meetings and interviews were recorded, while others were not. The questionnaire was answered by 22 imams. In 11 cases the chair and imam were the same person.

<sup>36</sup>In practice, in a just established society, it has not been so much a question of choosing an imam as of putting pressure on those with the best abilities in the Arabic language and Islam. Later on, the society may be able to choose an imam with some education as the young frequently go to study abroad. On the other hand, some societies were established by the man still serving them as their imam. In those cases the societies had had an educated man as their imam, who perhaps already had imam experience from their countries of origin.

<sup>37</sup>Although the Finnish gender equal inheritance system does clearly not combine well with the Islamic regulation about men's duty to support their wives and family, and some critical views were voiced.

especially if chosen by the communities themselves.

Some imams feel that imam training should not be remunerated, because the tasks performed by an imam towards his brethren are seen as an act of devotion, religious duty and service to God.

### **A follow-up project 2013–2014**

When the demand for training has been surveyed, a possible follow-up project is being planned, which will search into the dimensions and composition of education programmes for Muslim spiritual workers – both male and female – for language training and vocational and theological studies, as well as knowledge of Finnish society. As an important addition to the first project there is a need to look more closely at the situation active female members of the Muslim community find themselves in with regard to their resources and possibilities for acting as spiritual workers, as role models to their sisters in faith and representing the Muslim community to the rest of the society. Viewpoints on how the national policies on religion, integration, education and multicultural issues would affect the training under consideration will be gathered from public authorities, NGOs and experts. Different education providers and other cooperating partners will be mapped out, both on a national and an international level, and the Muslim communities will have an active role in conducting the project.

Partners from Muslim countries<sup>38</sup> will take part in both the planning and implementation of the project. In Egypt, Al-Azhar has a curriculum for training Muslim scholars that is both well-known and widely respected in the Muslim world. Morocco has a well-established and known school for women spiritual workers. Specific attention will be directed towards the education of female spiritual workers in Finnish Muslim societies. As part of the project we will design and carry out a series of workshops to train Muslim women for Interfaith Dialogue on different levels: 1) everyday face-to-face encounters with ordinary people, 2) national meetings of representatives from different faiths and 3) international high level conferences.

The project aims at gathering information about imam and female guide training

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<sup>38</sup>Requests for co-operation were sent to 5 Muslim countries through their embassies, and the countries that answered the request were chosen as partners.

possibilities to inform authorities and civil society about the current situation and future challenges. Imams who have good knowledge of the local language and surrounding society are better able to support the integration processes.

## **Future Objectives**

The future objectives of the project are:

- exchange with Al-Azhar to obtain information and experiences from their worldwide imam and other Islam worker training and its possible application in the Finnish and European contexts, plus possible exchange of teachers between Finland and Egypt, and other countries
- developing leadership training and perspectives for interfaith dialogue among Muslim women
- helping educational authorities and institutions in designing supplementary training for the current imams and other workers for the Muslim communities of faith
- consultations with universities/higher institutions of education to plan for long-term academic training
- direct involvement and empowerment of the Muslim communities and organisations taking part in the project, both in the leader and partner countries
- increased communication and co-operation between Finnish Muslim communities, as well as their empowerment for actively taking part in planning and implementing imam training in Finland
- gathering information for the authorities about the needs and requirements of the Muslim minority with regard to the provision of religious public services in education, health and social services
- Imams to be chosen according to established criteria in the national context.

The goal of FOKUS as a civil society organization is to promote dialogue between cultures and religions, and, for our part, to further the overall objectives of the UN Alliance of Civilisations, both nationally and internationally, by, among other things,

facilitating and co-ordinating the planning and communication of Finnish events for the globally celebrated UN Interfaith Harmony Week. The purpose of this article has been to highlight the preparation of an imam training study for Finland, which has been conducted in close collaboration with Finnish Muslim organizations. In the next phase of the project we plan to survey and identify the relevant domestic institutions and international partnerships that could be used in the further preparation of imam and female guide training for Finnish Muslim organizations.



## DIALOGUE AND THE GRASSROOTS

*Lars Silén*

There is an unfortunate tendency in our society to assume that if ideas are discussed on a high level, the results will automatically flow down to the grassroots. Unfortunately, this isn't the case. One could even say that no changes in the values held by our society are possible without a very wide involvement of the grassroots simply because the grassroots are the people ... us!

In my own faith, the bahá'í faith, very strong emphasis is put on dialogue as a pre-emptive tool for resolving conflicts. Open discussions intending to resolve some identified problem isn't a "silver bullet" designed to provide the solution to all problems. My experience is that in order to work as a conflict resolving tool, dialogue (using the bahá'í terminology consultation) is something that requires a great deal of work and practical experience.

I became involved in a dialogue between religions some 15 years ago through Heidi Rautionmaa. We gathered together a loose group of people generally interested in different religions and in understanding spiritual ideas. The group is today known as the Forum of Religions in Helsinki or, in Finnish, Helsingin Uskontojen Foorumi (HUF). Heidi has also arranged inter-religious sittings at Leppävaaran seurakunta (congregation) for a number of years, in a group known as the Siltapiiri meaning The Bridge group. The groups meet at irregular intervals for discussions and to visit different religions at their premises. We have also arranged a number of open lectures, discussions, music and other programmes at the University of Helsinki, at the International Cultural Center Caisa, the Social Forum of Finland, the World Village Festival and in other places. A few years ago we started to give the symbolic Golden Rule prize to people that have actively worked to foster an active dialogue between religions and spiritual traditions. Kaupunki yhteisönä ry has been in charge of the Golden Rule prize.

## **Dialogue is something that one learns**

I think most individuals that are interested in spiritual matters have experienced a situation where one gets completely stuck at a certain point when discussing some religious ideas. The situation is, to use a parable, like tennis, where both players are running at full speed and the ball goes back and forth but nobody is able to advance, the net is still between the players and no new understanding is produced. What is the problem?

What should be done in order to get out of the destructive loop “it is like this”, to which the other person answers “no, you are wrong, it is obviously like I see it”.

I think it could be useful to look at another area where dialogue has a central role and where the same kinds of problems easily arise, causing the process to get into deadlock. What I am thinking about is a general innovation process, where it is well known that to create a working innovation team some prerequisites are needed:

- The group has to be able to trust each other.
- No ideas put forward are owned by an individual.
- There are no stupid questions.
- There are no stupid ideas.
- Nothing that is said is intended to hurt anybody. It is of course possible to hurt somebody through ignorance, but this is ok and should be forgiven (see previous points).

The list can of course be longer.

In a typical brainstorming session the intention is to create a situation where the participants are at ease and willing to put forward as many ideas related to the topic of the session as possible. In the initial stage, the intention is to gather as many ideas as possible, essentially any ideas, and the “quality” doesn't really matter. In order for this to work, one should try to achieve a playful mood where people dare to put forward any slightly crazy ideas, possibly accompanied by some laughter to show that you are playing. It is well known that it is extremely easy to destroy a brainstorming session

simply by having one participant asking “why do you want to do it like that?” to almost any proposed idea. The word “why” seems to act as a trigger that switches the brain from a playful “anything goes and it is funny” mode to an engineering logical/analytical mode that is known not to produce any really new information.

When gathering together a group of people to brainstorm some topic, several sittings are normally required to teach the participants how the brainstorming session is supposed to work. Initially, the brainstorming breaks down and stops many times because people are unable to stay in the brainstorming mood and sooner or later switch to the ordinary analytical mode, actually killing the whole process.

There are a number of tools available to teach the participants to get into the correct mood - that is, to focus on the correct aspects of the problem. One popular method is the “Six thinking hats” based on a book by Edward de Bono. There are six hats, white, red, black, yellow, green and blue. The different hats signify:

- White, check the available information. What do we really know?
- Red, what are the gut reactions to the available information without any real justification?
- Black, discernment, logical reasons to be cautious.
- Yellow, optimistic, seeking harmony and benefits.
- Green, creativity, provocation, investigation.
- Blue, meta thinking. Thinking about how to think!

The six hats tool by de Bono is useful because it provides a very practical way of teaching people to switch thinking modes on command. One of the biggest problems, at least in the western world, is that we tend to use the black hat too much. We destroy new ideas before they are able to prove their value by analytically pulling the new idea to pieces through logical analysis. Of course logic is extremely important and all new ideas produced through brainstorming should sooner or later be evaluated analytically, but logic is also able to fool us very easily – and logic can be very destructive.

The first year at HUF was an interesting learning experience where I learned that in dialogue, the important thing is to learn to listen. When I ask a Christian or a Muslim or a



Jew about some interesting point that is part of their cultural and spiritual heritage I really should be focusing on listening and understanding what the other party is trying to say. If there are details I don't understand, I should ask fair additional questions formulated to expand my own understanding of what the other party was trying to say. Categorically, I should not ask, say, rhetorical questions where actually I am trying to forward my own ideas to the other party or other listeners. It is about trust! If I ask something, it is because I am positively interested in trying to understand some aspect of the other person's world view. I don't ask because I want to set a logical trap for the other person or to show my intellectual abilities. It is obvious that in a fair discussion both parties will gain understanding because both are forced to look at the world from new and unfamiliar points of view.

### **If it hurts, please tell the others**

It is very easy to hurt other people in genuinely open discussions, especially if the topic being discussed is religion. Religion tends to be something really personal, which means that unintentional criticism may hurt a lot without the person criticizing even knowing the other person didn't feel comfortable.

HUF visited the Studium Catholicum in Helsinki a number of years ago. Participants from the Catholic Church, Lutherans, Bahá'ís, Muslims, Christian Scientists and probably some more traditions took part in an interesting discussion about different topics. At some stage the discussion turned to some problems that the Lutheran Church in Finland had experienced. Suddenly a young Lutheran priest said: "now it doesn't feel good." We stopped the discussion and tried to find out what went wrong. It turned out that several people in the non-Lutheran group had their religious roots in the Lutheran Church, myself included. When the discussion turned to the internal problems of the State Church, these people were obviously interested in the topic and through their roots probably felt that the problem was still their problem because, in a sense, the Lutheran Church is still their home. The problem was clearly that the young priest didn't find it proper to discuss the internal problems of the church in a group largely consisting of non-Christians, and rightly so. After we had realized the problem, the discussion continued but the topic was changed. I think this was a very valuable learning experience that was possible because

one person dared to tell the group that “now it hurts”.

## **Grassroots and prejudices**

In 2005, the Siltapiiri (The Bridge Group) that regularly met at the Leppävaara congregation of the Lutheran church through Heidi Rautionmaa arranged a two-day long weekend seminar at Vittorp, owned by the church. Seven different religions/traditions attended the seminar. The surroundings were splendid.

The Siltaleiri was a great success, partly because adults are fairly seldom able to meet and discuss spiritual matters in a quiet surrounding and without time limits. There were a number of very interesting discussions, but there was one group of people that really impressed me.

Two young Shia Muslims from Iran and a slightly older Jew from Israel attended the seminar weekend. These three people were always seen talking together, during coffee breaks, at dinner and when we were walking outside in the beautiful grounds. There were never any visible strains, never any loud words, only these three conversing.

When we finally closed the seminar and gave our final presentations at the closing coffee gathering, the three together said that the weekend had been extremely interesting and that a very large number of prejudices had been broken.

This is, I think, the real core of grassroots dialogue. By getting to know people personally and by being able to ask questions first hand it is difficult to keep prejudices alive. Of course, dialogue doesn't mean that people will have one common view; we will unfortunately never get there. Dialogue will provide some understanding of how the other party thinks and in some cases some insight into why he thinks as he does.

## **Avoid the black hat in dialogue**

In the Western world we love the analytical, logical black hat, probably because we perceive analytical thinking as superior to other ways of thinking. Obviously, logical and analytical thinking has played a central role in building the western civilization, but still it

is only one of a multitude of ways to view the world.

In dialogue between religions, the analytical and logical black hat is extremely dangerous because we try to apply this thinking tool to an area of experience where many basic assumptions are poorly defined or defined in different ways by different parties. The reason for the language problem is probably that we, as individuals, are trying to describe our own experience of an invisible reality. We have our own experiences but these experiences are all slightly different and they depend on the individual observer. We are thus all like blind men trying to describe an elephant by feeling it with our hands. The only working way of describing our spiritual experiences is then through parables, parables that we hope will trigger an understanding similar to our own in the other person. This is of course well known in all religions. In, for example, Matthew 13:34 it is said:

*Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.*

If I try to logically analyse some spiritual statement presented as a parable literally, then obviously the result I arrive at will be absurd, and rightly so. What is needed is the realization that we need to approach some questions without prejudices, like children. The corollary, to enable us to find the real truth behind the parables in our world, is that the interpretation is always individual. A parable is presented because the presenter feels that the audience would be unable to grasp the idea if it were presented in ordinary plain language. If the parable is translated into ordinary language through some authoritative interpretation, we are back to the original situation that the original speaker tried to avoid and understanding will be diminished, not enlarged.

Dialogue is really a process where individuals actively communicate and share experiences. In this process there will be many ideas that I will be unable to grasp at first. When confronted with other ideas, possibly from a completely different tradition, I will occasionally have new glimpses of understanding that open up mysteries I was unable to grasp before.

I think real wisdom is to be able to say that I don't understand some ideas or

parables. This doesn't mean that I am dumb, it simply means that I need more input from a wider set of experiences to try to grasp yet another beautiful truth. The input is produced by a multitude of individuals who have all experienced some small bright glimpses of a larger spiritual reality. Of course, this doesn't mean that everything I encounter and everything I don't understand actually contains some hidden truth. It simply means that we, as human beings, are like ants walking over a sandy beach that we know contains an almost infinite number of valuable gems. Because we don't know where to look, we wander around turning over every single pebble and grain of sand hoping that precisely what we have in our hand is the gem we have been searching for.

The founder of the bahá'í faith wrote two small books as an answer to some questions by a Sufi Mystic. The books are often combined into one known as "The seven valleys and the four valleys". Bahá'u'lláh writes to the Sufi Mystic:

*It is incumbent on these servants that they cleanse the heart—which is the wellspring of divine treasures—from every marking, and that they turn away from imitation, which is following the traces of their forefathers and sires, and shut the door of friendliness and enmity upon all the people of the earth.*

*In this journey the seeker reacheth a stage wherein he seeth all created things wandering distracted in search of the Friend. How many a Jacob will he see, hunting after his Joseph; he will behold many a lover, hasting to seek the Beloved, he will witness a world of desiring ones searching after the One Desired. At every moment he findeth a weighty matter, in every hour he becometh aware of a mystery; for he hath taken his heart away from both worlds, and set out for the Ka'bih of the Beloved. At every step, aid from the Invisible Realm will attend him and the heat of his search will grow.*

*One must judge of search by the standard of the Majnún of Love. It is related that one day they came upon Majnún sifting the dust, and his tears flowing down. They said, "What doest thou?" He said, "I seek for Laylí." They cried, "Alas for thee! Laylí is of pure spirit, and thou seekest her in the dust!" He said, "I seek her everywhere; haply somewhere I shall find her."*



# THE FACE OF ISLAM: THE ROLE OF THE SHIA MUSLIMS IN FINLAND

*Paula Kemell*

## How did it all begin?

### *The oldest Muslim community in the Nordic countries*

Tatar merchants started to come to Finland in the 1850s when the new railroad connection between St. Petersburg and Helsinki was established. The first Tatar communities settled in Finland at the beginning of the 1900s. Freedom of religion was guaranteed for Muslims in 1922 and the Tatars registered the first Islamic society in Helsinki in 1925.

### *Growth and settlement of the communities*

Today, Islam is the second biggest religion in Finland after Christianity, and the number of Muslims is increasing steadily. According to 'Culture and Media 2011' published by Statistics Finland, more than 78% of the Finnish population are registered members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, which makes Finland a rather homogenous country in terms of religion. However, this is 10% less than a decade ago; at the same time, the number of people who don't belong to any registered religious community has risen to almost 20%. Immigration has brought new members, mainly to the Islamic and Roman Catholic communities. Finland seems to be following the general trend as, internationally, Islam is the second biggest religion in the world with 1.5 billion Muslims and the fastest growing religion with 40% growth since 1995. The exact number of Muslims in Finland is not known, but back in 2008 Professor Tuomas Martikainen estimated it at 40,000. Considering the age structure and high birth rate, the number of Muslims in Finland today is easily 60,000. About one-third of them are Shia Muslims. They are mostly immigrants from Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, and also from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, Lebanon, some African countries and native Finns. It is not common among the Muslims to become official members of registered Islamic

communities and a look at the statistics for the Population Register of registered religious communities shows that the total number of registered members is only about 10,000.

The Resalat Islamic Society - Ahl al Bayt in Finland - is a non-profit registered organization and the oldest registered Islamic community of Shia Muslims in Finland. Since its establishment in 2001 it has aimed at close cooperation with the decision-makers, local authorities, other religions, Islamic organizations and Shia Muslims from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Today, this dynamic society, with 900 registered members, stands as the flagship of the Shia community in Finland.

### ***Longing for the roots***

Resalat honours the great Finnish values, such as freedom of religion. It was originally established by a small group of Iranian families, but nowadays it stands as major centre for all Shias. A group of Iranian students and mixed marriage families who had settled in Finland felt the need for a permanent place in which to hold religious and other community meetings for their growing needs. In 2003 they found a place in Laajasalo, Helsinki, and started to renovate the premises, which had served as a Lutheran parish church since the construction of the building some 30 years earlier. In the 1990s, the Shia Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan faced persecution and oppression, and many families had to leave their countries. Many of them settled in Finland. The Islamic centre in Laajasalo became a second home for all Shia Muslims and the centre of their religious activities.

### ***Avalanche effect peeping round the corner***

In the beginning, when the founders sat together and decided to open a centre, their main aim was just to have a place where they could gather together to practice their religion and transmit the Islamic values and teachings to their children. The most important functions of the centre are the weekly meetings with prayers and teaching children the Holy Quran. The traditional programmes on special occasions, such as Ramadan, the month of fasting, and Muharram, the mourning time for the beloved third Shia Imam, also play an important role in the Muslims' lives. However, once the centre was opened, people started to come with different requests, questions and needs. It was soon obvious

that the expectations for the services of the centre were much wider and more urgent than was imagined. The members of the Shia community turned to the mosque with high expectations, not only for spiritual comfort but for religious services such as weddings and funerals, and consultation and advice on issues regarding education and domestic disputes, as well as when facing discrimination and racism. It was obvious that the community needed a long-term plan, lots of work and a capable leader.

### ***Looking for guidance***

One of the pillars of Shia Islam is the concept of *Imamate* - i.e., leadership of the Islamic community. It is also the fundamental difference we have with Sunni Muslims. Leadership has a vital position in Shia Islam. The spiritual leader of a local mosque, the *imam*, who leads the prayers and guides the people, should be the most pious, knowledgeable, trustworthy and just person. Muslim communities in Europe and other non-Muslim countries live in a very different position and circumstances to their fellow brothers in the Islamic countries. Here we have our own challenges and circumstances. It is necessary that the leader of the Muslim community should be well educated in the Islamic teachings and jurisprudence. He should also have a wide perspective, good language skills and be acquainted with the local rules and customs. The main theological schools for Shia Muslims, where the imams are educated, are in Qom (Iran) and Najaf (Iraq). However, today, distinguished Islamic colleges affiliated with prominent European universities have been established.

The imam of the centre is highly respected and has a prominent role in helping and guiding the members of our community to integrate and love this country and its values, and live in it as Finnish Muslims. The guidance of an imam will not go in vain if he succeeds in guiding the youth of the community to be useful members of society who identify themselves as Finnish Muslims. Very soon after starting the activities it was evident that the imam of the community should be a native. This year, our dream to have an academically educated imam from among our own community finally came true.

### **Activities**

#### ***Traditions kept alive***



Once the doors of our new centre were opened it became evident that the activities could not be limited to just prayers and Quran classes for the children. Contacts and requests for cooperation and services started pouring in from all over. Islam is still relatively new in Finland and information on Islam is sparse, whereas the curiosity and interest in Islam and the Islamic way of life has increased as the number and activities of Muslims in Finnish society have increased. Visitors from schools and organizations as well as requests for lectures on Islam poured in.

Muslims gather together to celebrate their great feasts, like ending the fasting, *Id al Fitr*, and the climax of the pilgrimage to Mecca, *Id al Adha*. During the month of Ramadan the mosques are more full than usual, and, for Shia, also during Muharram, the month of mourning. Besides these, Shia Muslims have other occasions of joy and celebration, like *Id al Ghadir*, which marks the appointment of Ali ibn Abi Taleb as the successor of the Prophet. Other important days are *Miraj*, which is the day the Prophet of Islam made his heavenly journey, and *Id Mab'ath* is celebrated to honour the day the Prophet Muhammed became a prophet. Besides these occasions there are some other days of joy and sadness that highlight the spiritual life of the believers. And on all of these days the Shia Muslims expect the centre to have a special programme for their families.

### ***Reaching the public eye***

Despite the technological revolution bringing us tablets, iPods, computers and smart TV, the traditional book has not lost its esteem as a source of information and the Finnish public are still very active in the use of library services. Therefore, publishing books and magazines is also one of the priorities of the Resalat Islamic Society.

Our most important, as well as our most challenging, project is the SALAM magazine, which is the only Islamic magazine published in the Finnish language. SALAM is a quarterly magazine that has been in circulation since 2007. The most amazing thing about this magazine is that it is made entirely by volunteers. The SALAM magazine gets state support for cultural magazines from the Ministry of Education and has become available in public libraries and the main bookstore, Akateeminen kirjakauppa.

SALAM is our most important device in increasing understanding, correcting misunderstandings and demolishing prejudice against Islam. For Muslims, the SALAM magazine gives an opportunity to accurately present the Islamic way of life and correct some of the basic stereotypes and misperceptions regarding Islam, its practices and principles. For example, non-Muslims will learn that Islam and Muslims have contributed a great deal to human civilization: many of the modern world's sciences and humanities benefitted from Muslims and from Islamic science and philosophy during the Middle Ages when Europe was in the dark time of its internal wars. SALAM tries to change the images and negative stereotypes of Muslims and non-Muslims alike. On the other hand, it also reflects on those current issues that affect the lives of Muslims. SALAM also writes about the Finnish culture and customs in an attempt to help Muslims to know and understand them better.

## **Co-operation**

### ***Striving for the common good***

After the 2006 bomb attack in London, fear, worries and prejudice spread throughout society. Among the mainstream, many started to suspect all Muslims of being bomb carriers and the Muslim community was afraid of the growing racism and insecurity. Resalat could not just sit back and decided to do something before things got out of hand and the Muslim community became isolated. We contacted the Council of State and requested an audience with the Prime Minister in order to discuss the concerns of the Muslim community and ways to strengthen peaceful coexistence. The Council of State was pleased with the initiative and the date for the audience was set. Because all Muslims are in the same boat, we wanted representatives of the other Islamic centres to join the meeting. In 2006 there were five major Islamic centres functioning in Helsinki. Unfortunately, representatives from only two of them were able to join the meeting. This historic meeting with Prime Minister Vanhanen proved to be fruitful and was widely reported in the media. The most important concrete result of this meeting was the Prime Minister's promise to solve the graveyard issue for the Muslims. Accordingly, all the acute problems were solved thanks to him.

### ***Dreaming of an umbrella organization***

Lost in the new society, puzzled about their rights and duties, the Muslims and Islamic organizations were constantly bombarding the public sector officials with questions related to education, burial and health services. The contacts were frequent and regarding the same issues. Explaining the same things over and over again was time consuming and frustrating for the officials. The Ombudsman for Minorities took on the difficult task of trying to gather all the scattered Islamic organizations and groups together and establish a joint organ that would act as a link between the Muslims and the authorities. Mr. Jukka Puumalainen, who was the Ombudsman at that time, actually managed to bring the Muslims around the same table and convinced them of the importance and necessity of establishing such an organization – an enormous challenge and a great job done by Mr. Puumalainen, knowing how diverse the Muslim field is with its many schools of thought, sects and cultural differences and dubious attitudes towards each other. No one but the Ombudsman for Minorities could have succeeded in this task.

As representatives of Shia Islam, which is a minority in the Islamic world as well as in Finland, we were pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the umbrella organization because we trusted that our interests would also be looked after through this organization. We rejoiced in Mr. Puumalainen's suggestion to include an article in the rules of the organization stating that the Board of Directors should have at least one Shia as well as one female member.

### ***Fading role of the umbrella organization***

This is how the first umbrella organization of the Muslims, The Islamic Council of Finland (SINE), was established in 2007. What an opportunity for the Muslim community! We sat on SINE's Board of Directors for three years, full of enthusiasm and eagerness to improve the position of the Muslims. The establishment of SINE was a beautiful idea and, in the view of the officials, things improved, because now they had just one address to send invitations to and to whom they could turn in matters concerning the Islamic community. SINE is still active and receiving financial aid from the government, but it has not succeeded in gaining the trust of the Islamic community and has failed to achieve anything valuable for it. Most of the Finnish Muslims do not even

know that SINE exists. Its biggest problem is a weak administration, which is based on the 'good brother' principal. Our society resigned from SINE because it was obvious that SINE could not execute the democratic principles of a free society. One vote, endowed to Shias by the ombudsman, was easily suffocated.

Today, SINE definitely does not represent the Muslims of Finland, not in numbers or in views. This is unfortunate for the Muslim community and has its own dangers as those officials who cooperate with SINE will get a biased and distorted view of Islam and Muslims.

Unfortunately, the cooperation at this level has not been fruitful. In the future we hope to gain a position of influence similar to that of the Tatar community.

## **Dialogue**

### ***Many faces of our own society***

Resalat encourages dialogue and starts it from within itself with a sincere heart. Our community consists of Shia Muslims, who come from very diverse backgrounds. The Islam of our Iraqi members is tinted with a rich culture and old traditions. The Iraqis who live in Finland mainly come from the southern parts of Iraq, where the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala are situated. The position and culture of these holy cities are strongly reflected in the way of life and thinking of the Shia Muslims who come from there. Shias who have fled from Afghanistan carry with them their traumatic experiences and old cultural heritage. We also have members from Iran, where Shia Islam is the state religion, and Pakistan, from where the sad news of the sufferings of Shias has recently reached our ears. Among us there are also Shias from African and Arab countries, as well as Finnish converts. Therefore, our society is balancing and coordinating different cultural backgrounds and ways of thinking. Our task is to discreetly find out and understand the cultural bonds and practices from their Islam and strengthen the common issues we share with each other. This requires excellent dialogue skills and trains us for more challenging dialogues with people whose values differ from ours. Once we have a constructive dialogue within our own community, we will learn to accept and live with our different viewpoints and will then be able to do the same on a larger scale.

### ***Brothers in faith***

In general, Shias and Sunnis live in peaceful coexistence, but as international politics and power struggles cause tension and mistrust among them in some areas, the cooperation is not easy and even impossible at times. Often, these divisions are fed by extremist groups. Unfortunately, Finland also has its share of the new political ideology, Wahhabism, which has been developed and fostered by Saudi Arabia since the 1800s. Its fanatical and hostile ideas have been spreading throughout the Islamic countries in recent years and their echoes can be heard here in Finland as well.

On the other hand, there are the Tatars, who are fine examples for Muslim communities to show how to cooperate with the government and live in a non-Muslim country for almost two centuries with dignity and honour and yet hold on to the Islamic values and way of life. The Resalat Islamic Society holds the Tatar community in high esteem and has eagerly strengthened relations with them in order to learn from their precious experience.

The principles of democracy, the ombudsman for equality, the equality act, and other similar measures the Finnish government has taken are excellent tools against discrimination and racism, and they provide a fine way for peaceful coexistence. It is up to the Muslims to learn to use these means to improve their own position.

### ***Shias love Abraham's children***

Resalat is committed to the right to religious freedom for all people and is eager to convene the interfaith campaign. One of the biggest challenges of globalization is having a dialogue with and understanding of the others. Enthusiastic discussion should mean being able to listen to and be aware of one's own prejudices and admit that the conversation partner might be right.

Some people are under the impression that Muslims are close-minded and unwilling to engage in discussion with people of other faiths. Nothing could be further from the truth. Actually, it is the Quran itself that offers very clear guidelines and encouragement for Muslims to engage in interfaith dialogue. In fact, our Prophet has emphasized that Muslims should have the best of manners and wisdom when speaking of faith with others. One must listen carefully, and share opinions with careful thought and patience.

The Holy Quran says: “Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His Path, and who receive guidance.” (Qur'an 16:125)<sup>39</sup>. “And do not argue with the followers of the Book except by what is best, save with those of them who act unjustly, and say: We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you, and our God and your God is One, and to Him do we submit.” (Qur'an 29:46).

Bearing these verses in mind, we have committed ourselves to interfaith dialogue in many spheres. Dialogue with Christians and Jews comes naturally as we share the same roots. The most challenging for Muslims is to have a dialogue with those who deny God or are polytheist or represent man-made religions. There are many ways to hold an interfaith dialogue, and it should not be confined to just one. We have attempted to engage in dialogue with experts, academics and key spiritual leaders, as well as on a grassroots level. Fine examples are the Lutheran Church dialogue with Muslims and Christians, which has been going on for 15 years, and the dialogue with three monotheist religions. Grass roots meetings are far more, but still not enough.

***Shias listen and learn to know their fellow humans***

The Resalat Islamic Society - Finland's Ahl al Beit - has been an active member of the *Helsinki Forum of Religions and Convictions* since the autumn of 2004. This forum consists of eight officially recognized and registered religious organizations/associations in Finland. For us, this forum has proved to be an ideal channel to create contacts and get positive publicity. Being part of an interfaith forum has helped our society achieve an active, open-minded and cooperative image. We deem this to be very important, especially today when prejudice and misconceptions of Islam are common among the majority of the people in the society we live in.

***Taking the opportunity to have influence in matters that concern the community***

Membership of the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO) is our greatest

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<sup>39</sup> Translations of the Holy Quran by Yusuf Ali

achievement in our endeavours to have a direct influence and achieve practical measures for issues that are important to the Islamic community. ETNO is a broad-based expert body set up by the Finnish Government. Its purpose is to promote interaction between Finland's ethnic minorities and the authorities, NGOs and the political parties in Parliament, equally at the national, regional and local level, and provide the ministries with immigration policy expertise in the interests of furthering an ethnically equal and diversified society. In the years 2007-2011 we were represented on the national body and in the current term (2011-2015) we are on the local body.

#### *Looking behind the borders*

Through HUF we have become acquainted with the United Religions Initiative (URI), which is a global network aiming to promote enduring interfaith cooperation and to end religiously motivated hatred and violence. URI has members in over 50 countries, representing more than 100 religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.

The members of URI come from diverse backgrounds with a common goal in pioneering interfaith dialogue and peace building skills. URI provides an effective communications and knowledge sharing network and the possibility to exchange practices at local, regional and global levels. Being part of this big family of cultural diversity has given us valuable experience and possibilities to enlarge our global network.

#### *In search of funds*

The need for financial aid is a reality. Religious communities finance their activities with membership fees, donations and fund-raising. In Finland registered religious communities with at least 200 members may apply for government aid for financial support. The amount is very small, less than 3 euros per registered member. The modesty of this amount can cause discontent because, on the other hand, the finances of the Lutheran and Orthodox Churches are guaranteed by law.

Therefore, it is not surprising that many Islamic communities have no choice but to look for financial aid from across the borders, especially because the members of the Islamic communities are mainly first-generation immigrants with low incomes and therefore unable to donate towards major expenses. The world of Sunni Islam is vast, and it is commonly known that its biggest financiers come from Saudi Arabia. Shias naturally

look for sponsors from Iran or Iraq, where the Shias are in the majority. These governments do not give any financial aid, so Shias mainly turn to the grant scholars (marj'as), who have Islamic tax money, *khoms*, at their disposal to be used for this purpose. Financial aid is usually requested and received for major expenses, such as the acquisition of or repairs to premises. Some religious charity organizations sponsor clergymen to travel abroad to teach and lead prayers during Ramadan or other occasions for short periods.

In recent years, Iran has been under international pressure and the tough economic sanctions have brought the financial aid from there to standstill. Financial aid from abroad is not an ideal alternative and as time goes by and the number of Muslims in Finland grows and their situation improves, they will be able to assist their centres to cover the expenses.

### ***Solving the practical problems together***

Co-operation between the Shia centres in the Nordic countries is increasing. Fast telecommunication systems and frequent and cheap flights make the co-operation easy.

The religious practices of Muslims are intertwined with day and night, as well as the seasons. Daily prayers depend on sunrise and sunset. Sighting of the moon's crescent defines the beginning and end of Islamic months such as Ramadan, month of fasting. In Finland, the length of days and nights varies greatly between winter and summer. Getting a sight of a moon crescent is most often impossible due to thick clouds and the position of the crescent down on the horizon next to the sun. Muslims are puzzled by trying to figure out when e.g. Ramadan really starts and ends and when to break the fast, as the sun's rays just will not disappear. These issues are common to all the Muslims in northern Europe and the Shia clergy from the Islamic centres in the Nordic countries together with help from the Shia scholars of Najaf and Qom try to solve these problems so that the right answers can be found and the unity of the community can be preserved.

Our Nordic co-operation is not limited to judicial issues, we also share guest speakers, artists and Quran reciters. In this way we can save on the expenses and double the benefits.



***Next generation***

Our greatest achievement is yet to come. So far we have managed to facilitate our community with a place to have activities, practice religion, convey and teach of our religion to the next generation and give a home for the Shia. God willing, this will strengthen the Islamic identity of the Shias, and help them to be Finnish Muslims and provide a legacy for their descendants to keep the light of Islam on for the generations to come.

## **SOMALIS MORE THAN 20 YEARS IN FINLAND – EVER DISCRIMINATED AGAINST, NOW STAYING OR RETURNING?**

*Esa Aallas*

Over twenty years ago I had a good opportunity to very closely follow some Somali refugees arriving in Finland. Their acceptance was rather controversial because of their different culture and religion, language and appearance. I called this phenomenon “Somali Shock” in my pamphlet (1).

Many people think the Finns belong to the North and the non-whites to the South. It is due to this prejudice that they see it as unnatural to accept non-whites in the North.

“I do not, however, believe that they will find their way here in any very large numbers, or that if they do, they will want to spend a very long time amid the blissful silence of the vast, uninhabited forests,” I wrote in my book ‘Exiles Everywhere’ (2)

Finland's economic recession deepened in the early 1990s. The policy of savings banks and agricultural subsidies increased the number of unemployed to nearly half a million. In this distressing atmosphere it was hard for many Finns to accept the more than 1,800 Somalis that came to Finland between the spring of 1990 and early 1991. Never before has our country received such a large group of people from Africa. The first post-war refugees accepted by Finland up to the 1970s were 200 Chileans, as well as hundreds of Vietnamese.

The post-war Finnish refugee policy was part of our foreign policy for a long time. President J. K. Paasikivi (1946-56) and his successor Urho Kekkonen (1956-82) did not want Finland to become a safe haven for dissidents who, for various reasons, wanted to leave the Soviet Union. Before the collapse of the USSR, most asylum seekers - “neuvostoloikkarit” as we called them – who crossed our 1,300-kilometer-long eastern border, were sent back by our authorities. Only a few succeeded in their attempt and they usually went on to the west of the country.

During his first term as President, Mauno Koivisto (1982-1994) continued the policy of his predecessors. The situation changed completely during his second term, when the

Soviet Union ceased to exist and the Somalis were starting to arrive in Finland. There were two specific reasons why the Somalis came to Finland. Prior to this, tens of thousands of Somalis had already fled to Western Europe, including the UK, the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden. First, Finland had had development projects in Somalia, such as a tuberculosis control project, since the 1980s. Second, just before the flight connections from Mogadishu were closed, you could only reach Damascus and Moscow by plane. A lot of Somalis were already studying in Moscow due to the connections. Somalia and the Soviet Union had when Major General Siad Barre declared Somalia a socialist state.

In January 1991, the President and the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Finnish Government took the view that Somalis coming from the Soviet Union could be safely sent back. At the same time, 163 Somalis tried to enter Helsinki from Tallinn by ship. Our immigrant authorities initially prevented them going ashore, but they were eventually allowed to land.

Mikko Juva, the Archbishop of the Lutheran Church, thought that courts martial are used in war time but during peace time those kinds of courts have no place in a democratic country. Those who were criticizing our President and government pointed out that there was no certainty that the Soviet Union would respect the UN Refugee Convention and not send the Somalis back to their country of origin. Later, at Lapinjärvi Refugee Center, I met bank official Mohamoud Dhuhul, who was a member of the board. He fled from Mogadishu in December 1990, when the last flights to Moscow were leaving. Dhuhul said that he left his country because of the terrible situation: “The sole purpose of our coming to Finland was to stay alive”.

At that time, less attention was paid to the news from Kenya, where, according to the Finnish journalist Mika Nyman, who had visited the camps, hundreds of Somali refugees were dying in refugee camps. Likewise, in the fighting in the death city of Mogadishu, as Peik Johansson, another Finnish journalist, reported in his Mogadishu diaries (Pakolainen 2.92)

In my work I often received enquiries from Finnish eastern border guards on Somali issues. I once read an article in a Finnish evening paper written by the very popular fiction author Jari Tervo. According to the article, many of the Somalis arriving at our

eastern border control post asked the border guards to “call for Aallas, Refugee Council”. Because I didn’t have any authorization, I used to recommend our refugees be taken to the centres for newcomers instead of returning them.

At the Rauhanlahti Refugee Centre near Mikkeli during the cold Christmas period in 1990, I met a Somali journalist, Mr. Mohamed Diesow, who was born in autonomous Puntland, which comprised the northern provinces of Somalia. Twenty years later I noticed that Mr. Diesow, who returned to Somalia in 2009, was the Minister of Energy in the Somali short-term transitional government during 2011. The war and the disintegration of the state in 1991 interrupted the search for black gold in Somalia. In the future, some as yet uncertified instances could enrich the oil companies as well as Somalia.

In a refugee barracks near Porvoo I met a construction engineer, Faisal Ali Farah. He arrived in Helsinki by train from Moscow with nine children in November 1990. I asked him to write about his experiences for the Refugee magazine. In one of his columns he gave an example of the clash of cultures: “One Somali asylum seeker had two wives. The Finnish police found this impossible to understand. They believed the man had two wives contrary to their own will. The police interviewed the two women separately and were amazed when both women said they were happy and had agreed to be married to the same man”.

Faisal also wrote about the poor atmosphere and staff at the refugee barracks, as well as how waiting months for asylum decisions affected their minds: “Some Somalis disagreed with each other. One Somali killed another over 50 Finnish marks. Two Somalis committed suicide during the year”.

Later I was invited to Hietaniemi’s Islamic cemetery in Helsinki, where a number of Somali men were taking part in a funeral procession.

In 2010, now a Finnish citizen, Faisal Ali Farah was a candidate in Somaliland’s Presidential elections. He was not elected. Somaliland, which consists of the borders of the former British protectorate, declared independence in 1991, but the international community has not recognized it. However, since 2009, the Finnish Immigration Office has considered it a safe country to which Somali asylum seekers may be sent.

One darkening spring evening in May 1991 at the Nastola Refugee Center near the

city of Lahti, I saw how the security guards, ‘the black berets’, stood guard over a nearby area to protect the Somalis. For some local young men, the Somalis were a reason for attack; they were stoned and harassed. Some Finnish men had illegally entered the refugee centre and spread rumours about the rape of a local woman.

I remember how the cartoons with Somali subjects by the very well-known Finnish caricaturist Kari Suomalainen that were published in Helsingin Sanomat, Finland’s largest newspaper, attracted a great deal of national attention. With 28 other Finnish activists, including the later Minister of Development Heidi Hautala, I added my signature to the petition asking the Ministry of Justice to clarify whether a caricaturist could be held to incite people to discriminate against refugees. The cartoons were considered to fit within the limits of our freedom of speech. However, because of the Somali cartoons, Helsingin Sanomat decided not to publish any more work by Kari Suomalainen, who was already of retirement age.

The Somalis, who were located in different parts of Finland, marvelled at some of our habits in this strange, cold country - like Abdi Jama as he gazes across the town of Joensuu from his balcony in the suburbs, “You keep your cats and dogs inside but you have to go outside if you want to smoke, even when the temperature is minus thirty degrees”.

For my part, regular follow-up on the Somalis’ integration showed their isolation lessened during the 2000s. However, I stayed in touch with my Somali contacts and wrote articles and made radio programmes on the issue.

In the autumn of 2009, sitting on train from the airport into Athens, my attention was drawn to a Somali man reading a Finnish-language tabloid. Abdiwahih Hussein Hashi, now living in Turku, was going to help other Somalis in Athens, where hundreds were living in poor, almost terrible, conditions - as I later saw.

Many Somalis were expelled from Finland to Greece because of the Dublin convention.

For example, in 2009, Finland deported more than 700 asylum seekers on the basis of the convention.

According to the Dublin convention, the asylum procedure must be carried out in the

first country of arrival. The convention determines that the state responsible for examining the asylum application shall be an EU Member State. The asylum seeker shall be taken back to the first EU Member State that he or she arrived at, which will then be responsible for examining the asylum application.

But, according to Mr Elias Ali Hassan, the chairman of the Somali community in Athens, one of the main problems is that the Greek authorities “are not prepared to set up a proper asylum system”. Instead of examination and protection, deportations to third countries, for example to Turkey, are common. The German authorities have recognized the extremely difficult situation for refugees in Greece because the influx is more than Greece can handle. The German court halted refugee deportation to Greece in 2012.

Most refugees cross the Mediterranean by boat and go ashore in Greece, Italy or Malta.

During a visit to Malta in 2008 I quickly realised how for many Somali, Eritrean, Ethiopian and Sudanese asylum seekers the tiny island was the first step, not the last, into the EU countries. Many Maltese people were strongly against those who were rescued on the Mediterranean Sea. They said: “our Malta is too small for them.”

The present Somali community in Finland includes about 14,000 people, more than 5,600 of whom are Finnish citizens. The Somalis are the fourth-largest community in our country, after the Estonians, Russians and Swedes, and the largest group of people of non-European origin.

Do we Finns accept Somalis today, after more than 20 years experience? I’m not sure. The EU study in 2012 shows that Finnish Somalis are one of the most discriminated against groups in Europe. Half of the people of Somali background say they have experienced discrimination in the past year, most often in the job market.

The fear that many Somalis feel in Finland is still real. The former chairman of the Somali League in Finland, Mr. Said Aden, considers Somalis to be victims in many ways. He argues that it is very difficult to build up a living in a place where you are not welcome. The difficulties appear as an outsider, loneliness, a longing for home, problems with family, unemployment, resignation and mental illness.

The fact that many Somalis, mostly women, living in Finland are illiterate increases the discrimination. A senior Finnish journalist involved in migration issues, Mr. Enrico

Tessieri, who was born in Argentina, writes in his blog that the treatment of Somalis in Finland sadly reminds him of how blacks in the United States were excluded from society in the 1960s.

For what reason after more than 20 years I'm thinking. In spite of the huge number of refugee authorities who are doing their best for immigrants and refugees in our society. In spite of the fact that Somalis do not buy up summer estates in Finland like the Russians do, which is a very sensitive issue in Finland because of our history. At present, hundreds of thousands of Russians, mostly middle-class and wealthy people from St. Petersburg, travel to and spend money in Finland each year.

I believe that one reason is hidden cultural and structural racism. Deep in our minds, surprisingly many Finns think that Finland is not good for non-whites. In principle, we do accept that biologically, human beings are equal. But in practice, many Finns argue that Finland is better for whites and Africa for non-whites, like Somalis. It's almost like the rich people who used to think they had to separate themselves from the poor people with visible or invisible walls. By the way, for wealthy people, it is often easier to accept others if they cannot see them in their own backyards.

This hidden structural racism also exists within our administration and policy-making mechanisms and practices. A few immigrants, and even fewer non-whites, are working as high-level authorities or are decision-makers. A few have been included in municipal councils and almost none have been elected to our parliament. There are only a few exceptions.

Ultra-nationalism is often part of the cultural and structural racism. You do hear that our Nation state is built for Finnish- and Swedish-speaking native Finns. When President Mauno Koivisto said that Somalis coming to Finland by train must be sent back to the Soviet Union, I was thinking that deep in his mind the President was reacting as a man who had taken part in the war and was one of those who had built up our post-war welfare state through hard work and sacrifices.

Today, the economic crises also close the doors and strengthen anti-immigrant attitudes. In Finland, the Finns Party (also known as True Finns) was very successful in the elections in 2011 and, according to Said Aade, Somalis became again a threat, a problem: "We can't afford to pay social benefits for all them". "What about our own

jobless people?”

On the other hand, most Finns agree that we must accept our responsibility as part of the international community to help and support the world's poor and displaced people. But many add: “better outside than inside. Here we have our own people who need help and support.”

That's why Finns gave a sigh of relief when the Foreign Minister, Mr Erkki Tuomioja, said after his visit to Somalia April 2013 that the Somali people were confident about their future. The Minister pointed out that Finland would not entertain any more refugees from Somalia and many were considering returning to their home country.

It is true that since the autumn of 2012 there have been significant developments in Somalia's political landscape, including the formation of a new government. But although the Somali government, the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and allied forces have made gains in Somalia during the last year, there is continuing armed conflict. The main armed insurgent group, al-Shabaab, is maintaining a presence throughout the rural areas and has the ability to carry out attacks, including on Mogadishu. For example, in April 2013, more than 30 people including women and at least one child were killed in a terrorist attack by the al Shahaab group two weeks after our Foreign Minister visited Mogadishu.

As time passes we shall know better if southern and middle Somalia will also become as safe as Somaliland and the northern part of Somalia for returnees. However, we have to bear in mind that the present Somalia is still a very poor country. According to a UN report in May 2013, almost 260,000 people died between October 2010 and April 2012 due to famine and drought.

Inside Somalia, more developmental projects will be starting in the near future with funding help from Finland. Many NGOs, like the Finnish Somalia Network, are carrying out projects in different sectors and areas in Somalia. According to Badal Hassan at the network, a joint Sahansaho project that was started in 2012 is operating in three areas in northern and central Somalia with co-operating Somali partners. The long-term objective is to combat desertification and reduce poverty.

In this situation, how about the Finnish Somalis, do they return to Somalia? Perhaps the elder Somalis and families will return first. I wrote before that many of the refugees



in Finland consider themselves only being here for the duration and many are longing to go home. But as the years pass, their hope of returning may gradually fade until they become Finnish Somalis, Kurds or Vietnamese. (2)

How about the younger, second-generation Finnish-born Somalis?

One Somali woman, born in Finland and working as midwife, said that although Somalia seems relatively peaceful now, she will work here in Finland and later return to Somalia to help people in need. One Somali man, also born in Finland and working at a postal centre, said that he will visit Somalia often but will come back to Finland because the biggest part of his life is here.

## **Notes**

1. Information Officer, the Finnish Refugee Council 1988-92.
2. Esa Aallas: *Exiles everywhere*, Edita 1997

## ENGAGEMENT AND COMMITMENT!

*Anne Hyvönen*

### **Mediatraining and health projects in Hargeisa hitting targets**

In the end of last year I spent some time in Somaliland, training and sharing my professional experiences with women journalists from Mogadishu and Hargeisa. I felt privileged and humble at the same time as I was witnessing the birth of the very first women-run radio station in Somalia. Aman radio started broadcasting in Mogadishu in the spring of 2013. In Hargeisa, it seems, they'll have to wait for some time, hoping that the government will again consider giving them a licence to be on the air. Radio Hargeisa is a state monopoly and the government does not easily accept newcomers in the market. Anyway, until then, there is plenty of "room" on the Internet for programmes on gender issues.

The goal in Aman's programme policies is balanced reporting. The Aman format will be developed in parallel with the training, where we learn together about the basic work processes in journalism and how to handle different sources of information successfully. The Aman ladies also have to decide when their prime time is and what kinds of advertisers they will allow to contribute to the radio broadcasts. There is a possibility to make their own commercial productions. The Aman staff are multi-talented and there are capable musicians plus creativity in making all sorts of audios.

Aman is already on Facebook, and their website will be ready soon.

The success story behind Aman radio began about six or seven years ago when the Finnish-Somalian NGO Shiffa and its energetic chairwoman, journalist Shukri Omar, started Nasib training for media women in Somaliland and Somalia. First they established the historic women-only Aman magazine, then came the idea of a women's radio. Women make the programmes, master all the techniques, do the marketing and handle the administration.

The aim is to become economically independent. This is a very ambitious thing in the

Horn of Africa, where the state economy is heavily dependent on foreign aid and investments. But Somalians are nomads and have been trading people since ancient times, which is a useful fact when developing the economy. We must use the abilities and resources of the citizens.

I also claim that the strength in our media training lies in the deeper mutual understanding of the culture, religion and social norms that rule people. We also share the inner knowledge of women's lot in this world. But the most important thing for me is mentoring. I have 25 years experience as a news reporter. That I can share.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has also been financing the Aman project. Technical equipment to build professional studios has been donated by the Finnish Broadcasting Company and by private donors. In 2012, the Women Journalists in Finland (Naistoimittajat ry) joined Shiffa. We mainly use English in our workshops, but it is also crucial that we can use Finnish as fellow citizens.

Empowering these women and giving them the self-esteem to work as journalists are indicators that in this case the resources are going to the right place and the right people.

In Somalia, international newsmedia like the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera are all around. The governments in Mogadishu and Hargeisa follow their own media agendas. Private television and radio stations have their share of the markets, but sometimes the quality of the reporting is not very high. Rich people can use television for filming their private lives, family friends and parties. There are also a lot of programmes where men are arguing about some issues they find interesting or important. Women are basically not included in such public debate.

I am very much looking forward to my return to Hargeisa in the autumn 2013. I will again meet those clever young women with the wit and courage to fight against the rules of the male-dominated society and newsrooms.

It is rather difficult to be a woman in Somalia, but even more difficult to be a woman journalist. They are downgraded, ridiculed, criticised and even threatened about their articles. It is hard for a woman to get employment in the media companies, and if they are employed, women are paid less and must obey the orders from the male bosses.

And there is always the risk of security. If they are working late in the evening and going back home after dark, there is the inevitable danger of sexual harassment and even

rape. Good women should be at home taking care of the family.

The civil war in Somalia at the beginning of the 1990s ended up in the collapse of the state and a huge outflow of refugees to different countries in Europe and North America. The first diaspora Somalis arrived in Finland between 1991 and 1993. Somehow, the integration into the Finnish society went wrong and a climate of racism arose. Things have changed over the years and today there's a new air of optimism and hope. The former refugees have been educated in Finland and have become important partners in our work in Somalia.

Everyone knows that sustainable development must come from within. The UN Cluster is coordinating its member organisations and the Somalia NGO Consortium is also doing its work inside the country.

In any case, progress is very slow and people are frustrated. They have good reason to be angry because there has been a lot of aid money coming to the country and still the evidence is that the building infrastructure is quite poor. During the fiscal crises in the Western countries there has been some sinister information. International corporations and banks are said to be taking more money out of the developing countries than the developed countries are bringing in. This relates to tax havens, where corrupt governments and the business elite can secretly put public money aside in private bank accounts.

### **Civil activists cannot be blamed, it would be too simple.**

Let's forget the negative thoughts and doubts, the experiences I had with the diaspora Somalis from Finland made me feel very optimistic about the sustainable development there.

I was pleased to meet professional Finnish-Somalian men, especially the trained nurses, doctors and IT specialists working as volunteers in the Hargeisa State Hospital, the tuberculosis hospital and a brand new laboratory provided by the Finnish Government. Three Finnish professional ladies who served as midwives in the delivery wards also belonged to this group.

Nurse Haddi Ahmed has been working in a dialysis ward in the Hargeisa hospital. The dialysis facility is the first of its kind in Somaliland. Mr. Ahmed is a Finnish citizen

specializing in renal malfunction treatments. He is very happy to be able to help his people in this way. “Maybe I could live here permanently”, he reckons. “But for the moment I can only work here temporarily, a few months at a time. My family lives in Finland and we are not getting any salaries. Only travel, housing and food supplies are covered. But this is ok at this point!”

In Hargeisa, Mr. Ahmed has dozens of colleagues from Finland and other countries in the European Union. While I was in Hargeisa, two doctors from the United Kingdom also joined the project.

The MIDA FINNSOM Health project is being implemented for a period of three years.

The project is based on priority needs identified by the local authorities and project partners in Somaliland and Puntland. Such needs will be matched with the available human resources in Finland.

The creation of personal and professional links, and the promotion of bilateral institutional partnerships will serve to institutionalize the Finnish-Somali diaspora’s role in the reconstruction of their homeland’s health sector.

I can also share here the experiences of a Somalian midwife, Fadumo Bulhan, who came to Finland with her family when she was four years old. Last year, Ms. Bulhan was in Puntland from June to November, working in a programme that is mainly organized by the international organization of migration, IOM. She worked in a hospital in Garowe, the capital of Puntland.

What she went through was sometimes shocking and sometimes just difficult. But all the same, also very enlightening.

Being a devout Muslim, it was very hard for her to notice that Islam was not just the Holy Khuran, but involved quite stunning cultural traditions.

Almost every mother to be in the maternity ward for the first time turned out be a victim of mutilation of the female sexual organs. “That was not a very good thing”, says Fadumo Bulhan. “There are all kinds of complications and health risks, and in the worst case scenario it can ruin the woman’s health totally. I am so sad about this.”

Furthermore, Ms. Bulhan says that the social rules are very binding and this tradition of mutilation is kept alive, especially in the countryside, by women who earn their living

by this.

Young girls face violence in the name of social customs masquerading as religious rules, family honour or reputation. According to the people committing these crimes, untouched girls are in danger of becoming nymphomaniacs and whores. And they risk not getting married and lack of respect from the community.

To enlighten Somalian communities and clans is not an easy job. People are very religious and want to obey Allah in all possible ways.

Development and aid work in countries like Somalia is about sharing information, and coordinating, planning and handling the administration. It often seems costly and ineffective, and of no benefit to the actual grassroots actors.

Donors fund the growing number of aid agencies and local NGOs. New players are still welcome of course and they could launch new ideas for aid relief and different projects on health, education and legislation, and the rule of law.

It has proven to be easier to mobilize funds for purposes like technical assistance, debt relief, food aid and emergencies than for real development projects and mechanism programmes. The latter demands long-term commitment and such people and such resources are hard to find.

My own engagement is based on media projects. I want to try to build a bridge between Somaliland and Finland through my netmagazine [www.baabeli.fi](http://www.baabeli.fi). This means exchanging multimedia material from Aman radio to Baabeli and vice versa.

There are a lot of young Somalian people living in the Helsinki region who are willing to contribute to making media content for Somalia.

If this masterplan is successfully implemented, it will also be possible to connect diaspora Somalis with those living in their old home country. Maybe there could also be a small-scale business enabling women to become entrepreneurs both in Finland and in Somalia.

The media seems to be the only open and democratic forum in this world of propaganda, but of course its message must be consumed critically. With a little help from the social media, public debate is hard to control. This piece of good news concerns women more than ever. Besides, the media can facilitate peace processes and be part of

politically equal discussion in civic societies. Religion can be among the topics as well. I would especially like to see how the media takes the interfaith dialogue into use.

During the last few months I have been actively working in cooperation with the NGO Faiths without Borders (Uskot ilman rajoja ry) and URI (The United Religions Initiative) Mena Women's network.

Dialogue is badly needed because religions seem to be lurking behind almost every ongoing conflict in this world.

## AUTHORS

**Aallas, Esa.** M.Sc., journalist, published a pamphlet entitled Somali Shock (1991) and was awarded the Finnish Committee's prize on the UN Day Against Racism (1995). He has contributed to Yle radio 1 on the issue and is involved in the Euromed and Media network and the ALF network.

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**Hyvönen, Anne.** Journalist, trainer, chief editor of [www.baabeli.fi](http://www.baabeli.fi). Anne Hyvönen is a Finnish journalist who has spent most of her career with the Finnish News Agency STT and thereafter as a freelancer and media trainer. She has been active in many women's organizations and trade unions, and was training women journalists in Afghanistan from 2009 to 2011 - where she is continuing in a new project during 2013 and 2014. In 2012 she started training radio journalists in Hargeisa, Somaliland. This project will end in 2014. Anne Hyvönen is employing drama methods in her training and is interested in community theatre and political document theatre. Besides that, she has been teaching Finnish to women from an immigrant background.

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Espoo municipality, Multicultural matter's negotiation board, chairman 2013-  
SARAB, Finnish-Arabic cultural association, member of the board 2009-  
Finnish Businessmen's Association, invited member, [www.suomenliikemiesyhdistys.fi](http://www.suomenliikemiesyhdistys.fi),  
2009- Finnish- KIE (Middle and Eastern European Business Association since  
17.5.2004 invited board member Finnish-Arabic Business Association (SAKY) 1993 –  
(since 2003 board member)



**Kemell, Paula.** Chairperson, Resalat Islamilainen Yhdyskunta - Suomen Ähl-e Beit (Resalat Islamic Society - Ahl Al-Bayt in Finland), has been the Chairperson of the Resalat Islamic Society - Ahl al-Bayt in Finland since 2004 and is a member of the editorial board of the Finnish language Islamic magazine SALAM. She is also a member of the board of the Religions for Peace Finnish network for women and City as Society, and represents Finland in the World Assembly of Ahl al-Bayt.

**Lappalainen, Rilli.** Secretary General of Kehys, the Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU. Rilli Lappalainen, M.Soc.Sc., is a member of the board of CONCORD, the European NGO confederation for relief and development. She also represents CONCORD on the board of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe and International Forum of National Platforms. She has previously worked in Taksvärkki, CIMO and the European Commission, and has been doing development co-operation work in Nepal and Senegal. Kehys organized a Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum in Morocco during Finland's EU presidency in 2006 and has since actively followed and participated in the Euro-Mediterranean work.

The Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU, Kehys, is ideologically, politically and religiously uncommitted collaboration –and a service organisation as well as a political development force. The function of Kehys is to increase the Finnish NGO's knowledge of the development policy and development collaboration practised by the European Union. Accordingly, Kehys attempts to improve the Finnish development organisations' possibilities for EU funding and contributes to networking and collaboration between Finnish and European NGO's. Kehys is a Finnish national platform of CONCORD, the European confederation for 1,800 European development and relief organisations. Kehys is also a member of the Anna Lindh Foundation and recently played a leading role in the Baltic-Mediterranean dialogue project.

Kehys has been involved in the post-2015 global work for several years as a Finnish member of the global Beyond2015 civil society network and a member of its European hub steering group.

**Latvio, Riitta** runs Interfaith Dialogue projects at FOKUS, the Forum for Culture and Religion, an ecumenical CSO, and is currently coordinating an Anna Lindh Foundation-funded project on imam training in co-operation with Finnish Muslim organizations. She is a graduate of the University of Helsinki with an M.A. in Study of Religion.

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**Maïche, Karim** is a Finnish-Algerian Project Coordinator with the Finnish Peace Committee and a Doctoral Student at the Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI).

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**Rantakari, Ilari**. Ambassador, UNAoC Focal Point, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, has served in various positions in the private sector, civil society and international organizations and Finnish Federation of Municipalities, as civil servant in the Finnish Parliament, and, since 1986, in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. He was Finland's Ambassador to Zambia and Tanzania and accredited to several Southern and Eastern African countries. He has been the Helsinki Ambassador to the Process on Globalization and Democracy since 2002, and has also served as Finland's Focal Point at the UN Alliance of Civilizations since 2010.

**Rautionmaa, Heidi**, journalist, M.Th., is a member of the Ambassador Advisory Council of the Parliament of World's Religions and a member of the co-committee of the Religions for Peace European Women of Faith Network. She is a co-founder of the Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network in Finland and Faiths Without Borders, URI CC. Heidi Rautionmaa is also a member of the Peace Education Standing Commission (PESC) of Religions for Peace in Europe and a member of ENORB, the European Network on Religion & Belief. She was a Global Council Trustee of the United Religions Initiative from 2002 to 2008. She has co-ordinated the activities of interfaith dialogue and co-operation at the grassroots level since 2000. Living together in cities, Kaupunki yhteisönä ry, and the Religions for Peace Women of Faith Network in Finland, Suomen naisverkosto, are members of the Anna Lindh Foundation's Finnish network. Heidi Rautionmaa has attended the UNAOC Forums as an NGO representative since 2009.

Heidi Rautionmaa gives training on interfaith dialogue and interfaith learning. She is soon to be a teacher in vocational education and is also a Ph.D student at the University of Helsinki/Teacher Education Department.

**Rusila Ari**, MA SocSc, is a Finnish freelancer and project management expert who lives in Jyväskylä, Finland. He has worked mostly in the Barents region, the Murmansk region of Russia and Kosovo/Serbia (Balkans). His main blog, Ari Rusila's BalkanBlog, covers issues such as conflicts, crisis management and geopolitics.

**Silén, Lars**, M.Sc, is a physicist and a bahá'í who has been active in dialogue between religions for some 15 years. As a bahá'í, the main focus has been on learning how to discuss religion in a positive way that enlarges all participants' world view. Kaupunki yhteisönä r.y./Living together in cities provides a good starting point for dialogue through the emphasis on the Golden Rule found in all religions. The Golden Rule could be used as a tool in a wider context in our "global village" to shift the focus from today's search for differences between people, cultures and religions to an active search for common ideas and beliefs. The differences that we all know do exist should be considered positive spices that make people from different traditions interesting and worth knowing.

**Veltheim, Risto** is the Coordinator for Euro-Mediterranean cooperation at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and a Senior Official for the Union for the Mediterranean. Besides this he is Finland's Special Envoy to the Libyan Transition Process.

**Virtala, Timo** is a lecturer, writer and translator, and secretary general of Loviisa Peace Forum, an annual summer event that aims to lessen the fears of humankind and celebrate life.



## TAMPERE PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

TAPRI, Tampere Peace Research Institute, University of Tampere, was founded in 1969 by the Parliament of Finland and began its activities in Tampere the following year. TAPRI is a multidisciplinary and international research centre whose mission is to conduct high-quality research on peace, war and conflicts. Its research focuses on the possibilities for peaceful change and the resolution of conflicts through peace building, mediation and reconciliation.

TAPRI's research policy programme takes social and international development prospects into account, and the progress of science based on the traditions of peace research. The general theme is peaceful change, on which the on-going research projects are based.

TAPRI's research is open and its results are published in national and international scientific forums. The academic personnel at TAPRI take part in the social and political debate based on their expertise. This includes cooperation with the media, NGOs and different educational and research institutions. TAPRI also offers teaching in peace and conflict research at Master and Doctoral levels.

## ANNA LINDH FOUNDATION

ALF, the Anna Lindh Foundation, started its activities in 2005. It was founded along with the Barcelona process and its aim is to promote intercultural dialogue between Mediterranean and European countries. The goal of the Foundation is to bring people together around the Mediterranean and Europe, and its mission is to improve mutual respect between the different cultures and to support civil society organisations in their work of building a common future.

All in all, 43 countries from Europe and the Mediterranean are part of the Anna Lindh Foundation. There is a national ALF network in each partner country. There are about 4,000 civil society organisations and other actors as members of these networks in the fields of culture, the arts, education and religion.



# TAPRI, Tampere Peace Research Institute

## University of Tampere

### TAPRI Net Series No. 5

In “A FLYING FINN...”, those Finnish civil society and other actors who, in the first decade of a new millennium, have participated in the dialogue between cultures share with us how they have lived the international and global dimension of their activities. They no longer consider themselves actors between Finland and the outside world, but see themselves as performing globally without being restricted to any particular national agendas.

In our global age, the equation between local, national and international is much more hybrid than it was a decade ago. The importance of all kinds of networking for Finnish civil society actors is confirmation of this. International cooperation has become a goal on its own. It concerns both individuals and organisations. This can especially be seen in the case of the authors of these articles; they are members of the Anna Lindh Foundation’s Finnish Network.

Today, the content of the activities is the main issue, not their geographic dimensions. The Finnish civil society organizations need international and global performances in order to be able to practice their programmes inside Finland. Thus one must act globally in order to be able to do it locally as well. This is also valid for individual people. If you want to accelerate your career in Finland, you had better have some solid international experience in order to succeed inside the country.

It seems that we have finally managed to locate Finland and ourselves within the global sphere. In other words, we have reached the stage of globalisation in our everyday lives. All of our “Flying Finns” are narrating this story from different angles and perspectives.

**OUTI TOMPERI** is coordinating the Finnish Network of the Anna Lindh Foundation. She is also participating in the national and international activities of the TAPRI Mediterranean Studies Project.

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